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VIRGINIA WATER



# VIRGINIA WATER

*by*

ELIZABETH JENKINS

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TO  
ROMILLY JENKINS

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## VIRGINIA WATER

Virginia Water, that graceful name, stirs echoes of melancholy and consoling loveliness within the furthest recesses of the mind.

A split chestnut fencing separates the gravel from the grass, which runs down to the water, screened by the drooping branches of strange trees. On a day in early autumn a Royal fête had left little tents, striped red and white like sugar-sticks, on the farther shore, and a boat in which some privileged individual pushed off from among them glided out into the water with a melodious splash, echoing into the silent morning air, so silent that afterwards there could be heard the gurgle of the water that left a train of bubbles under the boat's stern, and almost the drops that fell back from the raised oars.

A girl was walking on the nearer shore ; her black hair, beaded with damp, straggled down on either side of her pale face so simply that it gave her head a nymph-like appearance. As she walked slowly onwards the trees on either bank rose up above each other in dark masses, silent as clouds. The sunlight was veiled, but here and there a faint radiance showed on the pallid water and on the masses of foliage that bordered the still shores. The morning was dank and chilly, but she did not feel it, because her own thoughts had oppressed and chilled her. She did not notice the profound, illimitable trees, for they seemed to her unconscious eye the expression of her frame of mind. She was, for the first time, in love, and though the



feeling was only just born in her, its hopeless nature diffused an unfamiliar grief through her whole being even as this sombreness informed the scene. But the desolate prospect was harmonious, and though the shapes and sepia colours had the formal severity of French tapestry, the nearer view of the shores and bushes showed the lovely freedom and softness of natural growth ; while in her mind was already forming a haunting dread, only dimly felt, as of something terrible and destroying. Long after she would look back on this solitary ramble, and see, more clearly than she had done at the actual time, how some unrecognised but definite shape of sorrow had seemed to be forming itself out of the mist. She thought : " Next Thursday. I shall go to their party and nothing will happen ; and I shall be glad I have been. Nothing will ever happen." She had paused under an oak-tree while she thought this, when, as she moved on, the lurking radiance on the banks brightened all over them, as with a smile. The sun burst through the sky like white gold, and struck the water with its silver beams. The boat appeared far away as a black speck, poised between luminous air and water, in the centre of the white brightness.

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Roger Simon was forty-five when his *Life of Diderot* made a sensation on its publication in the spring. By the autumn it had been received in a most gratifying manner by the Académie Française and become in London the work of the year. His previous work on the Encyclopædists had aroused interest in a limited circle, but he was one of the people who come to their full powers rather late in life, and it was only now that

he had perfected the rarefied, exquisitely pointed, and elegant style that conferred an æsthetic distinction on his already existing reputation as a scholar.

The book having become fashionable literature, it was to be met with in the most unlikely places. People who were in no position to offer an opinion on the life or works of Diderot discussed it with animation, and almost proprietary enthusiasm, while others of the same kind achieved a point by confessing that they had glanced at it, but rather mistrusted that sort of thing, of which, they said, one sees so much, and referred to the author with careful nonchalance as "that tiresome old man." He had, in short, permeated the mind of certain parts of society, and his single mind was setting the tone of mental life, as everyone who was drawn into the area he influenced either identified themselves with that influence or reacted violently against it.

On the evening of the Sunday on which she had walked on the shores of Virginia Water, Fanny went to a little party at Ivan Archer's house in Hampstead ; she came late, as she had almost forgotten it. In the large, plain room downstairs, Ivan and two girls were already gathered. Ivan liked to surround himself with girls ; he seldom listened to what they said, but he enjoyed the milky bubbling of their conversation. This evening he had invited Sonia Hempel, a manicurist who was a perfect lady, and whom the other guest, Helena Braithwaite, and Fanny herself considered nice, but extremely dull. Her short-toed gold shoes, elaborately strapped over her feet, showed garishly beside the pale satin slippers of the others.

Helena Braithwaite was, notwithstanding, far less to Ivan's mind. Gauche and strident, and remarkably

lovely, she leaned against the wall in a yellow dress that made her look like a sheaf of corn ; her corn-coloured hair hung round her head like a curtain, and her eyes were set in flatly above her dark red cheeks, like the jewels in rings. Ivan professed to think her a horrid girl, and said that, though she was an ardent Socialist, she was snobbish to her father's servants. But as she was tall and beautiful as well as being intelligent and highly, if too academically, educated, she was sufficiently in request with other people to make him very much pleased when she accepted his invitations. Her conversation, however, was no use to him at all ; it was dogmatic, and strongly reinforced by subjects about which he knew nothing ; he thought her anxious pursuit of truth was disagreeable and a waste of time, and much preferred people who prattled softly and unconcernedly, as ignorance and prejudice dictated. But then Fanny, of whom he was, whenever he saw her, very fond, did not exactly prattle, either. She said rather little as a rule, and he often listened to it ; sometimes he even quoted it as a contribution to subsequent discussions with other people ; whereas he usually tried not to listen to Helena, and if he repeated his Sonia's remarks, it was done as he might, in describing her to someone, have sketched her head on the back of an envelope.

When Fanny came into the room it was magical with fading daylight and some starry, golden candles. She refused Sonia's offer to take her feet off the couch and make room for her, and sat down by the window. She felt that if Sonia were really in love with Ivan she deserved every consideration, and should keep her feet up as much as possible, and she was also in a mood to prefer being on the outskirts of a group of people. She

leaned her cheek on her hand, lost for a moment in the contemplation that under the deepening twilight all the colours in the room were beautifully arranged, and that the dim light had nothing to conceal, but was merely an added charm.

Ivan Archer was a man whose friends admired his judgment so much that they frequently gave him their favourite paintings. He was too much interested in the work of other people, and also too diffident of his own criticism, to do very much himself ; but the occasional drawings and paintings he produced maintained his reputation.

At the present moment he was deploring to himself the utter tastelessness of Sonia, while being obliged to admit that Helena had a beautiful eye for colour. Her vision, indeed, arranged it with the scientific harmoniousness of a spectrum, and, though she could discern the minutest subtleties of shades and always moved in a delicious concord of faint hues, she was incapable of the romantic arrangements he admired, and sometimes induced Fanny to imitate.

He had started a gramophone record of a band that played a loud and melancholy rhythm, and above it sailed up, battered between his emphatic voice and Helena's strident one, *The Life of Diderot*.

"That's all very well," Ivan was exclaiming, "but it doesn't *come* to anything. My idea is, that when the great and terrible day of the Lord shall come, and the trumpet sounds, and we are all changed, where the Simons were, you'll see a row of nothing but stalks, with little hard round heads, like hatpins."

"That's simply because you've no use for the educated mind ; you think it's represented by obscure dons and fashionable portrait painters who write for the

evening papers. You can't understand anything except what you can take in by purely æsthetic perception. You can't even . . ."

The music swelled and drowned their voices, and disconnected words floated above its waves like jetsam. "Mannerism," "Erudition," "Prejudice," "Ignorance," "Style," "What I say," "Exquisite," "Nothing to do with it," "I maintain," "I maintain. . . ."

In a lull Sonia raised her head, and enunciated carefully :

"There's so much of that about now, isn't there? I do think——" She made this earnest effort to be cultivated and intelligent merely as a duty, and not from any desire to push herself into a discussion with Helena ; she sank back immediately, but the false note seemed to chill and dissolve the contact of their animated minds ; Helena sat down with her head on her knee, while Ivan presented Fanny with a cup of coffee in his warm, fine hand, and murmured :

"I hope you don't mind Sonia. I know she isn't any use at this sort of thing."

"Surely it is to her you ought to apologise," whispered Fanny, as she took the cup. "She can't be very much interested."

"Oh, she's all right," he said carelessly. "She enjoys it. I think some girls like listening to a lot of talk they don't understand. It flatters them."

"Of course," said Helena aloud, her fingers full of grapes, "I do think the other Simons live by Roger ; at least, not Henry and Deborah ; they do so much work. But I think Athene is more or less his shadow."

"But I thought she did a lot of work on committees for proving that women are superior to men?" said Ivan.



"I think she's interested in the woman's movement," said Helena coldly. "I was not suggesting that she didn't occupy herself; but all that peculiar charm—if you do think it charming. Of course, you don't admire her."

"On the contrary, I think she's a marvellous creature. But I daresay you're quite right about its being a sun and moon business."

Fanny said faintly, "I don't see why. I don't see why her brother's being a great writer is responsible for her being charming any more than it is for her always feeling the cold, and that sort of thing."

"So you think he is a great writer, do you?" said Ivan.

"Yes."

"Ah, well, Fanny, you're one of the culture-mongers, you know. Have you seen him? You might think less of him if you knew what sort of chap he was; he might turn out not to hold his fork the right way."

"I have seen him, often."

"And do you know her?"

"No, but she sometimes comes to where I work."

"Of course," he said, "you're another of the woman-promoters."

"Well, I type for them," she said. "One must make money somewhere."

"Oh, Lord," said Ivan, who had two thousand pounds a year. He put on the gramophone again, and began anxiously showing some new step to Sonia. The party was joined by a young man who had a studio up the road, and who was madly pleased with the opportunity of putting his arm round the stately Helena's waist. Ivan offered to send out for another young man for Fanny, but she said she would go, and, wrapping herself in her cloak, said good night. Ivan followed her into the hall; and, opening the front door, revealed

the last glimmer of twilight in the sky. He fancied that since he had seen her a few weeks ago she had stepped into some mysterious shadow. But girls, he reflected, often withdrew themselves ; they never seemed to know where they were going or what they were really after, and when they were tragic they were at the same time unconscious of being so. It was partly that which made them so alluring. He stood on the top step under his crumbling but graceful portico, and watched her as she disappeared between the dark laurel-bushes. This was, unknown to many, a sign of favour, for the more he disliked people the farther, as a rule, he saw them off the premises. Helena he had been known to accompany almost to the tube station, while a Royal Academician had once been taken in a taxi to Victoria.

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Miss Athene Simon, at quarter to nine in the morning, was lying idly in bed, watching the motionless drapery of the curtains and the faint, thwarted gleam of sunlight on the washstand china. Though she did not outwardly show violent feeling, she resented, passionately and secretly, being disturbed before she was up. She received any intruder with an unwinking stare from under her politely arched eyebrows, and answered any questions put to her with a half-sentence that sent the victim out with a blight on him.

The room seemed to her a paradise of quiet such as a nautilus might find in its shell. The town house in which she and her sister and two unmarried brothers usually lived was so utterly familiar to them that it was with an effort they ever remembered to look at it with enough attention to see whether it needed repairs ; similarly it had never occurred to them to alter, except

by strewing about their own particular possessions, the furnishing of the principal rooms which had been arranged by their distinguished parents fifty years ago. Most people, however, are obliged to fit up their own corners—their bedrooms, for example ; Roger had ideas and taste on these matters, but Miss Simon professed to have none.

“ I dislike a room to look like a museum,” she would say vaguely, and was quite content with a single picture and a printed cotton counterpane.

She knew that she had to meet her niece, that she ought to order personally some things for the party they seemed unavoidably to be giving that evening, and that if she could bring herself to the necessary pitch of fortitude she ought really to see about another hat. She rose up in her long nightgown and went off to have her bath. Her strength always seemed slightly inadequate to the support of her tall and angular figure ; her face at the age of forty-eight had that dark and subtly tinted olive complexion of which the general effect is a curious pallor. In repose she was always tentative, always a little surprised, but when animated, by interest or irritation, her movements had a suddenness, her replies a sharpness, that came like thunder and lightning. A certain immaculateness, the unearthly grace of their limbs, which, though long and thin, were so delicately moulded, and the startled, myopic gaze of the opaque eyes behind their glasses, were common to them all, but while the others frequently branched out into idiosyncrasies, and bizarreries, she had with all her intellectual subtlety an almost bleak quality of virtue, and an extreme personal simplicity which made even a bottle of eau-de-Cologne ambré on her white-covered dressing-table a romantic and enthralling discovery.

She picked up her niece in Brunswick Square, and spent the morning in murmured conversation with her in and out of the Underground and up and down the roads which they were both secretly terrified of crossing. She gathered that Lydia was up to something, though she did not trouble herself very much as to what it might be, well knowing that she would have it all poured into her ear one night when she would be sitting up in bed and waiting to go to sleep. She thankfully submitted to being led into a shop in Oxford Circus and having exactly the right black felt hat perched on her head, admitting that Lydia was quite right in thinking, as she obviously did, that something deplorable would be the result if Miss Simon were left to the shop assistants and her own discrimination. Finally she saw her, with some reluctance, into a train for the New Forest, where it appeared that Lydia had to go immediately, exacting the promise of a visit as soon as she should be back, and so wound her way home past the necessary confectioners and Italian warehousemen, whom she asked to send up what things they thought would be suitable to an evening party.

When she reached the house, fatigued, she paused a moment in the doorway of the drawing-room, which had been cleaned that morning, and gave it, for all that she knew it so well, a long and searching look. The dark and spacious walls were decorated with a few portraits in agreeably tarnished frames, a painting of the Serpentine given by Whistler to their father, and a beautiful little Canaletto of gondolas, grey and white. A large Victorian pier-glass reflected the whole in vague and shadowy continuation, the cool spaces, the gracious loops and foldings, and the stately, uprearing lines

which formed the background for their own tastes, exquisite or perverse, or merely simple and discreet.

She was so taken by the quiet that she felt it a pity that in a few hours outside people must come in and disturb it all. She reproached herself, however, with her feeble-mindedness, and Mr. Woodhouse's words to Emma came into her head, "You will be quite safe among your friends." Yet of the hours so completely hidden, although so close upon us, how can we tell which of all their thousand and one possibilities may become fruitful on the soil of the hours that have passed? There is no means of telling.

However, she supposed she would be quite safe.

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Her light, slightly dragging step brought out Roger Simon to admire her new hat and to abuse Lydia for going away, just when he might have wanted to see her. He was suffering from an insidious and penetrating languor, a chilling heaviness of mind that deadened all his powers of enjoyment. Deep within was the secret well of bliss, filled with the knowledge that many years of mental workmanship had at last borne fruit that even he felt to be almost worthy, and he was exasperated that he should be in such a scattered condition that he was not able to feel its soothing, stimulating flow along his veins. The outward and trivial circumstances of his success were indeed a fitful distraction; it was amusing to have the inward assurance of how true his aim had been corroborated by the piles of newspaper cuttings, acclaiming him where praise was expected, and desired, and faithfully censuring him where it would have been disconcerting.

He decided, his head sunk on his breast and his dark



beard gleaming in the sunshine as he fiddled with the cord of the window-blind, that he must take a holiday, and that this irrational oppression of his spirits was due to the fact that the single point towards which his being had set for such a while was now removed ; the emptiness, he told himself, would be filled by the current of passing days as sand-grains trickle down each side of a hole to make the ground level again. He would not worry himself ; he would proceed from day to day idly, and without determination. But how was this possible, he thought, with sudden impatience, when the behaviour of the people round him caused him such irritation and dismay ? He had the agreeable companionship of his family, and there was his house, with its innately dear familiarness, and its reassuring seclusion. But even here there was to be a party this evening. The guests had been haphazardly invited by them all, but they were, so far as he knew, his intimate friends, people of whom he was genuinely fond ; but just now their behaviour did not quite please him. He was over sensitised, and they were not quite discreet ; they were, at present, just a little too pleased to know him. The women were worse than the men ; yes, he could think of one or two who were quite dreadful. With those in whom he was at all interested, his success had emphasised his relations. Their attitude was now so blatant, their remarks so extremely predictable. He was very fond of Mrs. Riley, but her broad smile when she met him in the Goupil Galleries was almost disgusting. She was very beautiful, very congenial ; everybody, including himself, thought her quite delightful, but he had felt, as his eye fell on the loop of her admired fair hair and her chestnut velvet clothes, that he had seen everything so much too often. He thought that if he stayed too long on this

path he would presently find himself poised over such tenebrous depths of questioning and horror that it would take him far too long to climb up into sense again.

Confound it, he had snapped the blind-cord. He would appear at the party and enjoy it, he decided, straightening his shoulders, and go to Paris at the end of the week, or the fortnight perhaps. He would tell Athene that the cord was broken, and that it was now impossible to roll the blind up, and perhaps she would know what to do about it, though as Deborah would be at home to-morrow it was hardly worth bothering about. He went into the hall, however, and called her, and stood listening to the light clatter she made as she ran down the polished stairs. Round the corner she came, leaping down on him, and as she touched the tiles, one heel described a skater's curve, and she collapsed, with his hands under her elbows, and he himself pulled down on top of her, so that they lay, mixed, writhing, and terrified, on the floor. They extricated themselves, shocked and breathless, and he said in an angry squeak :

"Why don't you walk downstairs like a lady, instead of bounding like an antelope? One would have thought you were old enough to know better."

She rose to her knees, gasping, and he put his hand over the back of her head ; as he felt the fine shape and fragile-seeming bone, he wondered what would have happened if she had fallen on it. He recoiled and rushed upstairs to his library ; he certainly would not attend the party unless he felt a great deal more like it than there seemed any prospect of his feeling at the moment.

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The unnerving incident haunted him all the afternoon, and destroyed the composure into which he had so carefully settled himself. When he was finally inside

his dinner-jacket he still leaned over his hearth, unable to face the gathering already forming below. He knew that Athene, however reluctant, would be fully competent to deal with the situation ; she would be standing now in the room downstairs, allowing herself to flow among the people because they were all her friends, loosening herself from that adamant fastness into which she was so often, in self-defence, obliged to gather herself up, but still unable to appear just like anybody else, even among these chosen persons ; hesitating here, darting there, she paid no attention to whether or not the guests ate anything, but, lightly skirting every group she caused it to sway and tinkle loudly, as if she had touched with her hand one of those ornaments of pendant strips of glass. Though as a rule she was so tentative and questioning, delicately refuting the assumption that she possessed any singular knowledge or ability, yet in moments of crisis, in railway stations or committee rooms or at parties where she had to be the hostess, she took the reins into her own hand, and carelessly allowed it to be seen how pre-eminent she was.

Roger himself shared so many traits of manner and behaviour with her that he was not, like other people, drawn to her from the outside, any more than it occurred to him, as he leaned against the fluted pillar of the hearth, to admire his own appearance. He sought her out instinctively as the haunt of perfect repose ; sometimes, however, he noticed her little ways and was struck by them as if he had been a stranger ; but he never understood how impressive was his own outward shape, how suggestive, in its extreme sensibility, and at the same time its unshaken poise, of a reed that, firmly anchored, sways and turns in the river. His mind was strongly humanistic in character ; its intellectual

sensuousness, its exquisite sensitiveness to beauty in its infinite varieties, to the simplest notes of feeling, its thrilling response to the exalted loveliness of virtue, and its satyric relish for well-turned grossness, gave him in the general eye an air of completeness and self-contained confidence, as of something endlessly receptive to new and changing impressions, but firmly planted on its own immovable base. He could not realise that a spirit such as he knew his own to be—so distracted, fearful, and rebuffed, so avid and humiliated, and so fulfilled by the joy whose intensity was agony in exploring the illimitable fields of the mind that he sometimes felt himself as lost to earth as one of the minute points of brightness in the fathomless ether, dark with the hollowness of its space—could present such an exterior as his ; and that when he bent down to talk to someone, feeling shy, he seemed to come down like a knife-edge, although his remarks might be few and murmured and purposely perverse.

As he moved slowly from the room and to the head of the stairs he began to wish he had gone down earlier, when the various arrivals had kept the party in a fluid condition and he could have taken refuge in the disordered state of the conversation. To come in now would be like making an entrance upon the stage. He leaned over the well of the staircase, looking down into the dimly lighted hall, now piled with wraps and silent with a balm-like stillness that enabled him to hear behind the closed doors the rippling and staccato sounds, the rustlings and murmurings and the pregnant pauses that showed how very well all the right things were being said, and how much everyone was enjoying this party in the house in which he might at any moment appear. He felt already the ravenous glances that would spring

upon him when he opened the door, and he was creeping down step by step, almost in an ague, when he saw that someone was standing in the hall by the piled-up coats, hesitating like himself.

He knew that though she was unfamiliar he had seen her before ; the thin strands of her hair, unoiled and uncurled, hung about her face with the soft darkness of charred wood, and she stood motionless, gazing at him like a sleep-walker, without a single gesture of eagerness, embarrassment, or even of recognition, such as had caused him to shrink in anticipation every time he met an acquaintance during the past two months. He walked down the remaining stairs and stooped down over her.

" Miss Arne ? " he said. Looking down into the unmoving, bright gaze, he saw that she was terrified past words ; her childish appearance and her very simple clothes reassured and soothed him in a way that at the same time made the idea of entering the drawing-room positively abhorrent to him. There seemed no need to enter into elaborate negotiations with her

" Well, shall we come upstairs ? " he said. " It is so much quieter." She followed him without a word, and he felt the same vanity and elation that he might have done in persuading a mongoose or other wild and suspicious creature to accompany him into his room.

The translation from wondering at what point among all that crowd of people he would be seen, and whether the least personal recognition would light upon her, to this state of being alone with him in his own room and face to face was so rapid and incredible that it inspired her with the irresponsibility of a dream. She walked slowly round the room, in which the thick carpet muffled her footsteps, while the coals dropped softly



into the grate. The room was oblong, one of the long sides being covered with books, which were too tightly pressed together for the titles to be distinguished on their pale, dark, and gilded backs ; the walls themselves were a buff colour sombred with narrow, dark green stripes, and over the mantelpiece, heavily framed in gilt, was a portrait by Laurence of a midshipman who had been killed under Nelson. The boy's figure in the skin-tight little cross-over jacket and striped trousers, and the fruitlike face with its blonde hair, wide-apart round blue eyes, and the shining coral lips pursed to a meaningless but oddly significant bow in the pointed chin, glowed on the wall with the heavenly softness and translucence of that school of oils. The picture was a source of constant pleasure to Roger as one of those shapes of elusive, visionary beauty made almost tangible in certain works of art.

Fanny had sat down opposite him by the fire ; she did not know how the time was passing, for from the intense effort of concentration on his every look and movement her mind gave off, and she found herself coming-to after a space of blankness that might have endured a second or an hour.

“ Her look is entirely hair and eyes,” he was thinking, charmed with the poignancy of these features in her insignificant, pale face. Her white silk dress and the three strands of coral secured round her little neck with a diamond spark gave her a certain affinity with the style of the boy over the fireplace ; perched on the chair before him, she reminded him of the pleasure he took in his young niece's company and of how annoyed he had been with Lydia for running away. As he looked at this creature it seemed to him that the more familiar he became, moment by moment, with her presence,

the more freely and securely he felt able to explore the possibilities she held. He rose on an impulse of enthusiasm, and, going to a corner of the room, he parted the cascade of an exotic plant with tenuous, parchment leaves, and disclosed a chipped gilt stand, supported by cupids and garlands and mottled with cobwebs and patches of crumbled plaster.

"What do you think this is?" he said. She came up and walked round it in silence. Was she, he thought in sudden apprehension, going to say that it was very rococo, and was it very stupid of her not to know what it might be?

"I don't know what it is," she said.

"You couldn't possibly," he assured her thankfully. "It was the stand of my mother's wedding-cake." He was congratulating himself that he might spring almost anything on her with perfect confidence in her simplicity and manners, and thinking at the same time how attractive it was to see her hands and wrists all pinky from the night air.

But Fanny was rapt by the prospect his words invoked, in which the past rushed back upon the contrary-flowing tide of the present, and the two forces met in a deadlock, a crystallisation of time. His mother, the centrepiece of the opulent domestic scene, alarmed and slightly quizzical under the decorated chandelier, but covered in conventional white satin and lace, alien among the neighbours as himself, yet innately familiar with a path of conventional morality that was felt to be as much a matter of course, as little a restriction upon inner, spiritual freedom as the routine of shawls and carriages and negus and biscuits after the theatre; and he, untied, released, never moving in a scene composed by the unthinking customs of other people, hardened

into a conventional frame, but always in a path of his own initiative, delicately selected and pursued at will. And yet they were of the same mould, and once he had sat on her lap and felt that his life and hers formed one whole from which he looked out on the rest of the world.

And here, in his particular and private room, was the stand of the wedding-cake ; she almost shivered as she imagined the regard of the severe and humorous face. The contrasting strangeness of the two fields of vision—both having the quality of a dream-world, although she stood in one of them—was pressing consciousness out of her mind.

His voice recalled her, speaking in a very quiet tone, and gently as if to a child ; she was relaxed and softened, restored to possession of herself by the wonder of looking at his face while he read aloud a book he had taken up, something amusing, whose contents, however, she divined solely from the inflection of his voice. She laughed slightly, and, feeling now fully awake, she sat down again, wondering whether she ought not to say something to show that she recognised the unusual character of the situation. It seemed too late, however ; they were so well afloat on this astonishing intimacy ; the intense stillness and the mellow light from the candle-flames, burning upright on their tall stems, made a background in which the now familiar aspect of the room sank into its just perspective, and on which his face and voice were presented to her, revealed in every strange line and subtle intonation, and apprehended with her whole being. The exquisite, laden minutes sped by while she hardly dared to breathe, till he suddenly said, still in the same quiet murmur, glancing with raised eyebrows at his watch :

“ I think—I really ought—to be going downstairs.”

Involuntarily she uttered a moan ; and instantly was covered with confusion. What a terrible thing to do, to complain after this unheard-of graciousness, to seem to wish to—— She drooped her eyelids in shame and horror, but he was saying gently, “ I do not think there is really any hurry.” He asked if she took walks, if she would not walk somewhere with him on Sunday if she had the time ? She hardly knew what she said, but he replied :

“ That will be very nice.” And she moved to the door. She was conscious of a quiver of surprise on his face as if she were perhaps behaving abruptly, but her complete inability to regulate her actions gave her in reality an unstudied, unencumbered movement, absolving them both from all tedious and perfunctory observances that in his wearied state he thought delicious. As they went downstairs he said, “ Are you going to be brave and face the tigers ? ”

She smiled and shook her head. He did not reflect how impossible it might be for her to do so. He only thought that she was behaving with perfect rightness towards him in not allowing herself to be spilled and adulterated among the crowd. He saw her disappear from the hall, and immediately he laid his hand on the door and went in.

He appeared in such complete possession of himself, and uttering his apologies and remarks so much in character, that he felt the animation his entry produced was, this time at least, solidly legitimate. His smile, with the slightly canine lift of the upper-lip that made it strangely unspiritual and alarming, rekindled the party's slightly waning glow, and rockets of fashionable talk shot up on all hands, descending in torrents of stars. He paused to allow one lady to tell him what she

had been saying all the evening about Van Dongen, and as he lightly burnished the subject with some reply of his own, it instantly ran round the circle again and united it in a single commotion. Under cover of this he glanced round and moved to where Athene was sitting on a sofa by the wall, in an angle of semi-darkness ; from here they commanded a back view of the heads and bosoms, shoulders and crossed legs, which was extremely interesting. He stood a moment by her in silence, filled with a curious elation, curling and uncurling her thin, tender fingers. " Her hand is like a fern," he thought. He took away the chocolate she was eating and put it into his own mouth ; then he leaned forward and whispered :

" I've broken the blind-cord in the morning-room."

" It will be all right," she said, her lips hardly moving.

He stood, fidgeting a little ; he was now in a fever for everybody to be gone.

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In the topmost branches of the trees that surrounded the erect and withdrawing house-fronts of the neighbourhood, the ragged-looking rooks lived a haphazard existence in their untidy nests, and when they walked about on the pavements below they did not seem at home there like the sparrows. Anthony Simon maintained a somewhat similar perch on the top-floor of the house of his father, James ; this dapper and malicious gentleman was an authority on the gem room of the British Museum. He inhabited a suite of rooms in the middle floor of his high-storied house, furnished in the extreme of sombre masculine elegance, and to which he sternly forbade the access of his son except on the footing of a visitor. He admitted that he could not force



Anthony to shave or send his clothes to the cleaners or use an ash-tray for his interminable cigarettes or keep his paintbrushes where they belonged ; so he considered that an existence on separate floors met the needs of both, and, living in his comfortable apartments with his silk dressing-gowns, his Napoleon brandies, and his library, he paid little attention to what went on over his head. The rest of the house, apart from the domestic premises, was given up to his daughter Lydia and her frequently changing entourage of governesses and companions. The matrimonial complexities of James Simon had resolved themselves into this state of affairs, which was partly responsible for the interest Athene took in her little niece. Lydia adored her, and it was always a gratifying moment for them both when Lydia arrived on the doorstep with a bag to spend the next few days.

Anthony Simon was sitting on the edge of his bed ; it was still unmade because the servant employed by his father to wait on him had come up three times already, and, finding him still in it, had finally retired, thwarted. He gazed round him with gloomy discontent ; the confusion of beautiful objects and slovenly untidiness that surrounded him, cluttering up what should have been bare and spacious walls and floors, filled him with a kind of nausea ; but as his energy was inadequate to reducing the baskets of wax flowers, spun glass ornaments under globes, dilapidated gilt birdcages, piles of canvas, crockery and paintbrushes to any sort of order, so his perceptions hardly led him to connect the squalidness of his surroundings with his depressed condition. The faint drift of mist and sunshine, and a pure, severe façade of which he could see the top portion out of his window, made him feel acutely that everything was wrong. He dragged his attenuated figure off

the bed and into his bath, where he began to revive a little under the warmth and the friction of a very handsome sponge, and to wonder, his thoughts becoming more active, what he should do with himself. He had no intimacy with his sister ; he hardly knew who her friends were, and his aunts and uncles, though kindly, were obliged to be a little reserved in case an undue familiarity with Anthony should involve them in the intolerable tedium of the society of his friends, the male members among whom were chiefly art students who would have found it a little difficult to produce any convincing reason as to why they should not have gone into offices and become self-supporting, and the females, young ladies whose intelligence was almost exclusively absorbed in the cultivation of a femininity that bordered on the professional. A régime of public houses and dirty studios, a perpetual blustering and decrying of unread works suspected of academic tendencies, and a loose manner of living contradicted by the wildest explosions of conventional morality when anyone was attacked by jealousy or a desire for revenge, did not create an atmosphere with which the elder Simons could reasonably be expected to compose. Though they had no objections at all to joining the painters who were their friends in a companionable half and half at whatever public house was convenient at the moment, the society commonly known as artistic and bohemian they regarded with the detached curiosity that they would have displayed over the semicircle of confused substances a retreating wave had left at their feet. But to visit his relations brought out in Anthony various graces and strengthened the indefinable charm, a faint reflection of their own, that gave him his standing in the society in which he moved. He always felt renewed when he

had chattered to any of them ; his perceptions were sharpened, and the malaise from which he so constantly suffered was soothed by their society after it had been derided or commiserated by his noisy friends.

He decided, putting on his clothes, that he would seek out Roger ; that would be an extremely good thing to do. He went downstairs, and set off along the intervening pavements, that were so quiet and clean in the pale sunshine that his progress was as peaceful and private as if the roads had merely been a passage in the house from one room to the next. When he came to the door, however, he learned that Roger was out ; that he had been out some time, and that it was not known when he would be back.

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As they stood on the steps of the National Gallery, the sunlight slanting down outside the grey pillars transformed the two fountains of Trafalgar Square into bouquets of cloudy radiance. Fanny, dazzled by them, was hardly conscious of what they were. The burning clarity, the beauty so intense that it ushered into the mind utter soundlessness and stillness, of the Claude landscapes before which they had been standing, still lay like a weight on her senses.

They had spent the morning at the Wallace Collection, Roger pleased and amused, Fanny in a state of enchantment. Undisturbed by other visitors, they wandered slowly through the fairy-like apartments of glass and gilt, where the cool morning light gleamed softly on the polished floors and lit up little jewelled points of brilliance in the treasures piled up in the centre of each room and displayed along the walls. The eye turned delightedly from the wreathings and convolutions of rococo design and the tints of rose, turquoise,

sea-green, and white and gold, to the pure light outside the long windows, and back again to those triumphs of beauty in the guise of prettiness that are among the most cherished achievements of human fancy and ingenuity.

Fanny, stooping over the case in which lay the ivory and gold piqué necklace given by Marie Antoinette to the Princess de Lamballe, laid her hand on Roger's sleeve.

"Oh, look, do look!" she entreated.

"Yes," he said, "yes." But he had made off suddenly to the Claudes in the National Gallery. To his remarks on the way she had not listened with her whole ear, so divided was she between the Sèvres tea-cups and the ornaments in three tints of gold that they had left, and the sense of his own presence beside her.

"If I could choose a picture out of all the collections for myself," he had said dreamily, "I'm not sure that I wouldn't have a Claude. A basis of such profound and solid technique, and the grace and aerialness, the easy perfection of supreme art. The stimulus, the balance and the rhythm," he murmured, taking her elbow as they crossed the road, "and the utterly—elusive—intangible—quality of perfect loveliness."

The words came back to her as they stood before the blue-green sky, the intense yet inward light that broods over the olive foliage and classic pillars of the "Embarkation of Saint Ursula." Unaccustomed as her eye was to the beauties of French classicism, she could see enough to be spellbound; but for the complete understanding of the miracle of combined reason and sensibility, poetic insight and intellectual enlightenment, the realisation of which is ecstasy too deep and in itself too little-understood for words, she turned to him.

Thus they stood on the steps while the fountains played

before them in the sun ; she knew that as this had been merely a Sunday morning engagement she should now be prepared to terminate it. Perhaps, drooping above her, he was at this moment waiting for her to say the word that would loose them and send them about their several ways. But she stood, and when he moved to go down into the square she followed him in silence.

“ Will you be amiable, and lunch with me ? ” he asked, and it was not until they had gone some paces that she realised she had not answered anything. Yet here they were, going out to lunch.

“ He must think me half-witted,” she thought. Yet when they were sitting drinking coffee under palm-trees with the embankment framed in pink geraniums outside the window, and he sat looking at her with his faint smile and talking in that particularly gentle and soothing voice that he had used on the evening in his room, she felt that her behaviour was, somehow, all that was expected of her, though to herself she appeared almost vacant, and unsuitably attired in a prim and childish tweed overcoat.

He was reflecting that when one found pure feeling in young creatures like this it was delightful, because it meant that all their little tricks and ways were at once reft from them, leaving them sitting, oblivious, with their hats crooked, and so intent upon the object that rapt them from themselves that they had no attention left to bestow on those touchings-up and little formal precautions which were always occupying them when they were in full possession of their senses, and conscious of admiration from the other person. But something in the angelic appearance of her eyes gave him a vague feeling of uneasiness. He leant forward, and as she flushed and quivered, her eyes swimming in brightness, he said :



"Do you think your friends would mind your coming out to lunch with me?"

"Mind!" she exclaimed. "Why ever should they?"

"Well," he said, "they might remind themselves that

In the morn and liquid dew of youth  
Contagious blastments are most imminent."

She drew herself up.

"He *does* think I'm half-witted," she thought; but aloud she said, "That refers to children—Elizabethan precocity. Not to people like me."

"I beg your pardon," he said humbly. "I thought it might refer to people like you, perhaps." He sat regarding her with his intent, slightly quizzical gaze.

"Rather like a domino," she thought. "A double two that's had the surprise of its life." It was so delicious to her to sit in this casual intimacy, to have the most precious essence of life scattered over a meal like lunch, among the painted and stupid faces and the heads getting a little thin on top of the ordinary lunchers-out. She let her eyes wander vaguely about the green fronds over their heads and over the shining grey vista behind the geraniums, to have the luxurious pleasure of being able to turn them once more upon him. She struggled with herself to fix in her mind some explanation, some analysis of his unearthly, elusive, yet constant charm. In the stress of her effort it seemed as if his shape would fade away, leaving her alone with the broad-day clatter and inanity and the fibrous palm-tree stems. But the pallid, slightly hollowed cheek above his beard, turned sideways from her, filled her with sudden, exquisite rapture. Her senses cleared; for one moment she comprehended him in all his adored attributes.

And at the same instant that she relinquished the desire to formulate the reasons for her ardour, it was borne in on her how subtle was the charm of his conventional behaviour, so far excelling in its kind that of the people who prided themselves on being normal and gentlemanly fellows ; his quiet and distinguished bearing, his unobtrusive clothes and his unconsciously authoritative manner of dealing with the waiters, contrasting with the strangeness, the inner mystery stealing forth in his glance, and his fabulous, long hands, one finger of which was decorated with a magisterial gold ring.

"Where shall it be ?" he said. They were discussing another Sunday to be spent together, though even now this hardly seemed possible. Suddenly she raised her head and looked at him, so close to her, gazing at her with this fond amusement. Her heart beating with elation, she cried, "Let's go to Virginia Water !" To visit those shores, the scene of such desolation, to bring him there in triumph !

"Virginia Water !" he repeated, raising his eyebrows. "Why ever should you want to go there ? It is so far, isn't it ? Still, we'll go there if you like. Why do you want to ?"

Why did she want to ? In an instant the dark shape that had been lurking unrecognised beneath her heart revealed itself. Never, never could she tell him how she had spent days and nights in feverish longing for some chance encounter with him ; how in her secret thoughts she had intruded into every aspect of his private life that she could imagine ; the indecent avidity with which she had clung to every slight connection that he had with the outside world ; walking past his house at night to spy the lighted cracks in the blinds, deftly leading on the conversation of people who made any

casual mention of him, and, whenever she found herself in a post office, turning up the S's in the directory and brooding over the addresses of himself and his family. The injury to self-respect which the ordinary mind sustains on becoming obsessed by another person and the indelicacy of the outrage, inoperative though it was, on the rights of individual privacy she had temporarily forgotten in the insecure, tremulous ecstasy of the last ten days. Now, confronted with the scene on Virginia Water, her impulse had betrayed her ; her obscene and preying nature, she felt, was triumphing in the unbelievable success of her designs.

"Oh, no," she cried urgently, "don't let's go there—it's an odious place really—only the name, the name is so pretty. But don't let's go there !"

He was laughing outright now ; he gathered himself up in mock alarm and propitiation.

"Very well, very well, we won't go there," he assured her. Under the enchantment of his gaiety and tenderness her first horror vanished. But the shadow of some confused foreboding had fallen across her path ; never again, she felt, would she be quite without dismay.

\* \* \*

Miss Simon had passed a morning as chairwoman of a female committee which had reduced her to a humiliating condition of fatigue and nervous irritability. In ordinary life, she moved as freely as the wind, and, as it seemed to many people, with the same erring and inconstant motion. When anyone, knowing her reputation as a woman of wit, tried to be funny in conversation with her, her behaviour assumed an arctic severity and literalness ; when, on the other hand, someone

laboured with her earnestly, she would seem to give a sudden skip in the air like a rabbit rushing downhill, and shatter his efforts by sniggering in places where he could see nothing humorous, and interrupting all his carefully composed sentences with her preposterous remarks. When she was executing what she conceived to be her duty, however, such behaviour could not be. She sat, dull-eyed, through the discussions that arose on this point and on that, conducting the meeting with great care and competence, and gazing intently but inexpressively at the ladies who one after another rose to their feet. Perhaps she thought that the prevailing habit of dress, loose woollen skirts that sank sharply in to the back of the knee, and jumpers that cut the figure at the most emphatic point, was rather particularly unfortunate for the type who most affected it.

She sat now, respiring peacefully at an open window that was bowered by the waving, diapered branches of the plane-trees in the square. She was littered with scraps of pale green georgette, and sewing together underclothes at Lydia's direction on a plan that seemed to her neither rational nor elegant, but she supposed that if the girl wanted to have them like that it was not for her to say anything.

"Could you really?" cried Lydia joyfully. "I'm so busy. It would be angelic of you!"

"I don't know whether I could, I'm sure," she had said doubtfully. "I don't understand these—exiguous—garments, but if you'll show me *exactly* what you want done . . ."

So now she sat, conferring the sanction of her exquisite stitches on this scanty and haphazard clothing. It was a balmy, lazy, intimate afternoon. Lydia, who had been engaged in trying on, was affronted to find herself,

in the most undignified form of undress, in the presence of old Lady Neville, who was so intimate with Athene that she had walked up the stairs unannounced. Adoring Miss Simon as she did, Lydia was both jealous of the silent friendship between her aunt and this terrible old lady, and frightened by the latter's penetrating glance and her deep, indulgent laughter. She put on her clothes in as haughty a manner as she could, while Lady Neville sat down in the window and watched her with great pleasure and amusement.

"How is your brother getting on, my dear?" asked the old lady. Lydia knew that, though Athene would not make the smallest effort to assert herself in the conversation (their intimacy was so deep, so rooted in years before she herself was born, so fostered in circumstances of which most people now knew nothing), but would continue to sit sewing with bent head, yet she, Lydia, would be completely separated from the real life of the party by the invisible, secret bond that tied the two together and bound them up from her. She therefore answered more slightly than was quite polite, and left Athene to say, softly and casually, that Anthony was better, and had the prospect of a commission in Paris to paint the walls of a room for a friend of Roger who had seen and liked his work; Roger was to arrange it on his forthcoming visit, they thought. Meanwhile she herself put on her skirt, and, walking quietly out of the room, ran upstairs to Athene's bedroom. Here she first painted her lips bright red at the glass over the dressing-table, and then, taking an Italian novel from the austere book-case, she threw herself on to the bed, and writhed about on the quilt in a perfect passion. She lay there for three-quarters of an hour, until downstairs the tea-things were being

brought in and Athene laid aside her work. Deborah Simon had come home and was standing before the fire. Larger and more robust than Athene, she was also cruder and more childish ; but, apart from the obvious likeness between the sisters, the same quality of intelligence was manifest in her abrupt enquiries and unexpected laughter, and from under her rather rough tweed clothes could be seen the same glimpses of radiantly white linen.

Henry Simon was lying quiet and exhausted in a fireside chair ; his pale face was framed in a much yellower hair and beard than either of his brothers', and, though his eyes had the raised, enquiring look, they were more serious and concerned. He sat with perfect immobility, resting his feet on the fender, and feeling that the scenes amid which he had passed the day, medically examining the children of L.C.C. Elementary Schools, were a long-drawn-out phantasmagoria, and that the region of real life was here, with his sisters sitting in the room and the pleasant, subdued clinking of tea-things.

"Quite hopeless," Deborah was saying ; "most dispiriting ! I hadn't seen her since I was at college, but I remembered that she was extremely interested in what she ate, so I prepared a fabulous tea, with everything and more to eat and drink, at immense exertion, and it ended up by her having bread and butter in the passage, because strawberries gave her appendicitis and the flowers gave her hay-fever."

"What were the flowers ?" enquired Henry, hardly able, it seemed, to make his voice audible.

"Oh, I think they were some camellias floating in a dish," said Deborah. "Something quite restrained and tasteful."



"Camellias!" exclaimed Henry. "I don't really think . . ."

"Oh," said Deborah recklessly, "anything vegetable gives it to her—a new potato! I assure you . . ." She was all gaiety and asseveration, consciously preposterous and swinging with her heel on the fender, while he, too much worn down to adopt any attitude or to do anything but merely exist, sat contentedly watching her antics.

"The photograph is downstairs," said Athene, escorting Lady Neville. "I scratched it up for you yesterday."

The lights were put on, and the round, silver muffin-dish appeared, a comforting, delightful object. Athene saw Lady Neville into her waiting carriage; she refused to stay to tea, having promised "to look in elsewhere" (she confided to Athene on the stairs where exactly this was to be, and Miss Simon supported her intention with an inarticulate murmur). The latter then went up to her dark and chilly bedroom, where the curtains were not yet drawn, and approached the bed.

"Why didn't you put on the gas-fire if you wanted to stay up here?" she asked in a voice of cold surprise. She put on the light and combed her hair at the glass. "Don't you think some tea might restore you?" She crossed the room once more, and, standing over the inanimate heap, laughed her gentle little laugh. Lydia sat up, avoiding her gaze, and pushed the hair out of her eyes.

"Oh, my quilt!" cried Miss Simon, leaning forward in dismay. "You villain!"

"I can't help that," said Lydia crossly.

Old Lady Neville, sitting in her carriage under the drooping plane-trees while the coachman gathered up the reins, looked at the photograph on her knee. It represented Athene twenty-five years ago, standing in front of a tall screen of bushes, in a black blouse and long, moulded, black skirt. The unlined face, which had come out as very pale, had a soft, distracted look, quite foreign to it now ; there was something recognisable in the expression of the eyes under the exquisitely arched brows—the mocking, enquiring look was faintly discernible, but overlaid with a strong physical timidity, since suppressed or hidden. The angular character of her form was here softened down into the infinite slenderness and softness, the almost childlike delicacy, of the young woman.

“ Yes, yes,” thought old Lady Neville, driving away, her deeply sunk eyes dimmed and haggard, “ yes, the nervousness and impatience, the timidity and haughtiness and gaucherie, the silent precocity and the adorable, childish, shy affection ; and the wonderful early morning of intelligence, the sensitiveness, the tentative beginnings of so perfect a taste ; and, above all, the youth ! the youth ! ” What was it she remembered ? The hot, bright little room in Biarritz, after lunch ; she herself writing postcards in the window, with the large bow at her neck and her leg-of-mutton sleeves, and on the bed Athene, lightly asleep, with damp temples, and the long slender forearm bent upwards, the half-opened hand lying by her cheek. It could not be said why this scene should come back with the recalling of her passionate tenderness, her consuming anguish of protective love. But now, as she stroked with her firm, magnetic old hand the photograph it was too dark to see, she was shaken by an emotion that would hardly

have been credited by those who knew her as the celebrated old lady—imposing, cynical, kindly, humorous, adamant. For under all the impressive progress of her outward life, her manifold public and private concerns (she was one of those people of whom it is understood, without any definite specification, that “they do so much”), and in all the intense enjoyment, the solace and inspiration of this friendship in which the mature woman had so abundantly fulfilled the promise of the girl, in which she not only found the repose of perfect intimacy and the sweetness of long years, but which was so perpetually cool and freshly flowering that it preserved in her, old as she was, and long hardened and perfunctory in other directions, an undiminished, lively delight ; yet still, unknown to any living being, she yearned in her heart after the young creature, lost in the journey of so many years.

Driving away in the dusk with the photograph on her knee, she felt a stab of bereavement and desolation that was a matter of astonishment to her re-awakening self. She knew she had nothing to lament ; that the passage of time, far from decreasing the value of her treasure, had made it a hundred times dearer than before ; but, sitting bolt upright in the corner of her carriage, she allowed herself one long moment before she must compose her features to meet the glare of lights and her mind to the task of resuming its present existence.

But though Lady Neville looked back to a past, it seldom occurred to younger people, startled or absorbed by her, that Miss Simon could have had any existence outside the present. That alert and lively lady who was yet so silent, often seemed to outsiders to be almost an incarnation of intelligence—her very bodily appearance at times partaking more of the nature of an illusion

than of a reality like that of chairs and tables ; and therefore, since she set the standard towards which the other people in the room panted and aspired, she was the quintessence of the actual moment, the elusive significance which is felt to be at once exciting and stately, and which has flashed by before it can be grasped.

Helena Braithwaite, walking under the trees with Emma Vining, glanced up at the window, now an amber niche in the growing dark, and said :

“ Do you know the Simons ? ”

“ No,” said Emma coldly. Helena could not properly be said to know them either, but, having seen Roger and Athene at rather more parties than others of her friends had attended, sat next Deborah at a concert, and having also an uncle whose practice occasionally brought him into contact with Henry Simon, she adopted an air of intimacy in referring to the family which was no more pronounced and a good deal more justifiable than that of quite a number of other people.

But Emma seemed to know nobody ; nobody, that is to say, whom Helena would have thought anybody, though through having been at the University together they had one or two dear and private friends in common ; they both, too, knew Fanny.

“ Give her my love if she’s in,” said Helena, turning down a side street with no further parting ceremony, in the way that was somehow redeemed of its brusquerie by her flaming cheeks and hair, and her lovely walking that suggested the cleaving, uninterrupted passage of an angel.

Emma walked down the edge of the pavement, her nose buried in her large fur collar. She very much hoped Fanny would be in ; then they could have tea

and a nice long talk about prison reform. She was so well on with the research she was engaged in that she felt perfectly disposed for social relaxation. Fortune favoured her, and she was soon seated warming her elegant legs before the fire, while Fanny did her best to cut bread and butter, a feat at which she never excelled, but which she always felt obliged to undertake on these occasions, because thin bread and butter was the kind of food that Emma most liked to eat. She watched and admired her as she took her hat off and warmed her hands, staring into the fire in haughty silence. Her ashen hair sprang away from her head in a way that gave her eyes and forehead a very spirited look, and her chin protruded from her long neck with uncompromising determination.

As they sat on the floor in the firelight, passing the plates to each other, the sounds of a piano played overhead came faintly down to them as if they were crouching in some dim grotto at the bottom of the sea.

"I'm going to Paris," said Fanny shyly. Emma raised her eyebrows and said nothing.

"Quite soon," Fanny added. Her intimacy with Emma was such that to confide such a prospect was almost necessary, and her reliance in her taste and sensibility so perfect that Emma's beginning to ask questions did not alarm her, since she knew that not a word would be said that might push her to distress.

"Alone or with someone?" asked Emma, looking over her cup.

"With someone."

"Oh," said Emma, "I hope they're nice."

"Very." Her voice quivered in spite of herself. There was a considerable pause, and Emma began with that

darting directness with which she speared a new subject of conversation.

“The more I see of matrimony, the less I think of it, in itself.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Fanny, with the absent-minded readiness of perfect acquiescence. Emma watched her narrowly as she surrendered her cup and felt satisfied ; she was going to let the subject drop, but Fanny in pure unself-consciousness continued it, and asked whether she was going to pay a visit, much desired, to her sister, who was in the family way.

“I am not,” said Emma. “When she got married she stopped being a person and was simply a child-wife, and I had to listen to all the stuff—housewife’s difficulties with the maids, what Edgar said about her don’t you know and so forth—all that was trying enough. But now *I* am not a person, either ; every creature who goes to see her is simply one more person to whom to explain the importance of people who are going to have babies. Well, there are plenty who are quite anxious to be that—why bother about me ? Besides, gynæcology always makes me feel queer.”

“It does me too,” said Fanny, “but I am a little sorry for your sister ! These family confidences are so soothing, aren’t they ? Besides, they are part of the young matron’s prerogative. I’m afraid she must take on a good deal in secret while you’re prancing up and down the Hampstead roads, you naughty thing !”

“The whole business is deplorable,” said Emma coldly. She had been so fond of her pretty sister that she could not bring herself to forgive this dreadful state of things in which her shape had been borrowed by a little Mrs. Edgar Sutcliffe of 6, the New Crescent.

“Well, how is your reading getting on ?” said Fanny.



"Quite well," was the laconic answer.

"And have you met that person who was the authority yet?"

Emma's face hardened.

"No," she said. "Now, when people come forward with promises of useful introductions, I regard them as conversational openings."

"It might still happen . . ." ventured Fanny.

"Yes," said Emma, "exactly. But what elderly people can't or won't remember is that when one is this age one's life goes about six times as fast as theirs, and to say it may happen any time in the next eighteen months is just the same as to say it may never happen at all."

"I know," said Fanny, "and it makes it doubly exasperating when you know it's merely indolence on their part. The whole of last summer Ivan Archer was on the verge of introducing me to some people, and when I finally went so far as to ask him if he really were going to do it, he said 'Oh, yes, of course,' and rang them up to find they'd left the country the week before. All the same, when nothing prevents them except indolence, it is always possible . . ." Emma stared at the flames.

"Oh, yes," she said, and the clear, small tones seemed to ring flat against a background of infinite hopelessness. "And I daresay when one really gets to know these people they aren't a bit more exciting than one's friends and not half so pleasant, but that's just it—one waits and waits, and when, if ever, it does happen, it's just an ordinary meeting." She broke off, thinking, "All your feelings that were so mysterious and exhilarating have been just crushed away under weeks and weeks and weeks of waiting while these

people have been saying, "Certainly. Haven't I promised? It might happen that I come across him any time, and then I would certainly mention it." It seemed to her that exasperation and despair such as she was experiencing for the first time were demoralising and that it was indecent to talk about them, as it would be to go into the details of some nauseous disease with which one might be afflicted. But before making the effort to restore herself to her usual elegant composure she dropped, with venomous gentleness, the observation :

"When one is younger it never occurs to one that the core of things that one knows is there and always thinks of in connection with oneself can be so absolutely inaccessible that one might just as well not be living at all."

Fanny was horrified, she had never heard such a speech from Emma, or heard those weary, edged tones trailing out of her disdainful lips. She sat speechless, while there rose before her the vision of Emma gliding silently through the streets of London, as completely isolated with her faint, pure ray as a will-o'-the-wisp on some desert marsh. She could think of nothing to say to distract or to relieve, but it was Emma herself who guided the conversation back from this abyss.

"What nice cigarettes," she said. "When do you go to Paris? How long does the office give you?"

"Quite soon," said Fanny, pressing her hands against her chest. "A fortnight, and I shall go the last week." Long afterwards she was astonished to remember the way in which her terrible, secret joy had flooded up, and made Emma's words seem as extraordinary as a frightening dream to a child that wakes up in broad sunshine.

"I do hope it will be nice," said Emma. "Can I help you with those stockings?" Fanny thanked her kindly, but said that guests could not be allowed to do these things. She felt that she could not relinquish to anyone the meticulous preparations of the clothes she was to wear.



"Should you not like to buy a dress in Paris?" he asked as they rose from their seats under the awning.

"Oh, yes," she cried; adding hastily, "but I must pay for it." She stopped and blushed, and he was altogether delighted.

"I don't mind either way," he assured her, "but, as I have more money with me than you, I should have thought it would be better to let me do it."

They got into a taxi and were hurled madly down the streets.

"You must choose it, then," she said, holding on to the door-handle in her agitation and feeling that to be shot off the seat or to behave in any but the most correct manner possible would be a humiliation she could not endure.

"But how ignorant I am," she thought, glowing with emotion, for she discovered, when she was pitched forward a moment later, that he picked her up in the most natural way, and with a reassuring tenderness that made her realise that when one is with the person one adores almost anything tiresome or embarrassing that happens is simply a part of the general happiness and not to be feared or missed. Roger, whom a considerable experience of Paris taxi-driving enabled to keep his balance, replied calmly:

"I don't know much about ladies' dresses, I'm

afraid, but I always think what you wear seems very pretty and just what I should like to see you in." The rather stiff words seemed to fend her off from that burning intimacy, deadening to sight and sound, that they had been approaching in moments since the time of their landing, and, by throwing her back within herself, made her feel with renewed acuteness the charm and wildness of the situation ; directly a plan was proposed, or the prospect of lunch or tea was brought into the immediate future, she was aware that before her was a maze of untried, exquisite sensations of wonder and delight. Their present expedition loomed before her with barely veiled, delicious splendours of happiness.

"When I think," she thought, "that in the old days"—for she was now so proud that she had cast off the life of a fortnight ago to the region of the outworn past—"the day was adorned if I had seen him walk down the street !"

He might not know much about ladies' dresses, but he knew where to find those who did. The shop was at the corner of a street, and had two walls of windows lined with fluted grey muslin ; it was empty except for two pale dresses folded up like water-lilies and displayed on stands : a little shell of silence outside which the noises of the street surged past. On their entry, however, two attendants in black satin came forward, one of whom at a word from Roger took off Fanny's coat and hat with many encouraging exclamations, while the other opened the doors of a long glass cupboard, and began searching among the thrilling, silvery rustle of tissue-paper. They brought out a dress of dark red sequins and slipped it over her head. The bodice hung down almost to her waist, showing her white chemise, and the skirt, designed for shortness, draggled half-way

between her knee and ankle. She looked so pathetic and so silly in it that he was half inclined to make her wear it, but they finally decided on a white gauze powdered with little flowers and ornamented with rows of tiny silver buttons. Fanny was assisted into her dress again, and Roger produced a note-case ; there seemed no doubt on anybody's part but that he would pay for it.

(Well, he *had* chosen it : he had said it was the right thing.)

As he turned sideways under the white light, she was struck by the contrast of the worn, bulky leather case and his unearthly fingers ; it was repeated, too, in his figure, with its inordinate length and smooth grace and the typically masculine pose of counting notes. The commonplace action emphasised every rare charm with almost overbearing intensity. She heard the parting courtesies of the assistants, and walked out into the street with the striped box under her arm, hardly able to determine whether she were awake or asleep.

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As he sat opposite to her at dinner he was so much engaged in exploring the situation in his mind that there was no conversation between them. He admired her appearance in the voluminous, frail dress, and her deft yet nervous movements. The wild, shy airs which had first captivated him were combined so piquantly with a quite mature capacity for emotions. Her excitement was so great that her silence seemed not many degrees removed from the stupor of delirium ; and yet she was incapable of the smallest advance towards him. She was only the instrument, responsive to his hand. He had thought that in dealing with anything so young, he would encounter spontaneity ; in his

previous and select affairs, the lady had taken a rôle of initiative at least equal to his own. He had expected the same freedoms in Fanny, with more artlessness ; it had never occurred to him that his own age and experience would so overweight the childish spirit, leaving it incapable of independent action.

To end the strain of the meal he took her by the hand and walked over to the fireplace ; they sat down in the area of sparkling light and heat, and he asked her, smiling, whether she didn't think Paris the perfect place for holidaying ?

"It is interesting to me," she said, "because I see that it is your second home."

He was taken aback by this remarkable primness ; her voice sounded flat, as a doll's might be, and she was sitting bolt upright beside him. He laid her hand on his knee and held it there, and the gentleness of his behaviour made her almost burst into tears with mortification at her own stupidity and at something in her that vibrated intolerably at his touch. The blank blackness outside the window and the leaping, spirited fire to which their faces were turned made her feel that she was experiencing for the first time the sensation of being alone with him ; the unhappy frightenedness that had closed over her in the last few minutes began to thaw, and the sight of his bent profile, above her and looking into the fire, and the touch of his thin, flexible hand on hers, seemed some goal to which her existence had been travelling and which had been waiting for her, though she had only just caught it up.

"Have you had many affairs here ?" she said. He was momentarily startled, though from the way in which she said it he knew he need attach no more importance to it than to a remark she might have made



in her sleep ; the extraordinary *naïveté* pleased him, nevertheless, as a robust person is pleased by a plunge into cold water. He looked down at the delicate outline of her cheek and laughed a little, and they sat, talking in snatches, till the quickly burning wood-fire had consumed itself to a ring of embers, and the warm darkness flowed up round them.

“ You will be cold if you stay here any longer,” he said presently, noticing her shiver. “ Hadn’t you better go to bed ? Have you everything you want ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” she said hastily, and dived through the labyrinth of gloom that led to the door.

In her bedroom she saw with some surprise that the sky was half illuminated by a hidden moon ; it appeared a vast hollowness of faintly shimmering grey. Below, the roofs and tree-tops were vaguely discernible, and now and then the light silvered an edge of roof or the side of a branch, giving the scene a secret, significant appearance. The looped-up curtains over the bed and the window made a thick dusk in the room, and her figure, as she moved silently about, was white in the darkness. She could just see her way from bedpost to chair, and to the ottoman where her suit-case was lying open. She undressed and put on a white dressing-gown over her nightdress ; it was too long, and trailed after her as she crossed to the window and sat down by it. Seen through the crystal pane, the luminous, silent world looked strange and remote as in a dream.

She had sat about ten minutes when she heard the door open quietly, and rose to her feet. In the darkness, he approached almost without her seeing him, and sat down on the window-seat. She could feel neither excitement nor pleasure nor fear ; but she noticed, even in sitting down, how graceful his every movement was,

and she adored the way his head bowed slightly forward between his shoulders. She could hardly distinguish his face, sitting as he was with his back to the panes.

In the silence she remained standing beside him, till he put his arms round her and lifted her on to his knees. At his embrace a wave of ecstasy made her feel quite weak and dizzy. She tried wildly to collect herself, to take in every second of this happening, the scarcely hoped-for, the unattainable. She forced herself to feel, as someone floating upright in the water seeks for the ground with straining feet. With an involuntary movement she turned her cheek to his shoulder, and the smooth, fine surface of his coat seemed to unlock her powers of sensation ; she was conscious of his arm beneath her neck, of the support of his drooping, slender body. With an effort that was almost physical she forced her rapture into a compass that did not stupefy her. He remained, holding her in his loose, firm clasp ; as she lay looking at him, her eye, accustomed to the gloom, gradually made out his face and the soft, dark fall of his beard. An evanescent ray showed distinctly the line of ear and cheek bone, and this glimpse caused a sudden tremor to go through her ; she felt that in another moment she could not remain supine ; one of them must move or say something.

Then, as if to hide from the moonlight, slowly brightening behind his head, he bent down and kissed her. She lost power either to breathe or see ; she was only conscious of the darkness all round her head, of his kisses, and the long pressure of his hands.

For how long this lasted she had no idea ; the first impression that marked her returning consciousness was that of the wide sky hanging over them ; she gazed at it in silent fixity, and slowly made out a shape

that was eluding her—the crown of a poplar-tree whose green and silver seemed to melt into the air, and only to be tangible close round the dark stem.

Her hands clung to his shoulders :

“ If only I could die now, or be turned to stone ! ”  
It was a thought ; she did not realise she had whispered it until his low voice answered with the rallying, protesting note :

“ You’re so much nicer as you are ! Think of my feelings if you turned to stone in my arms ! ”

“ Yes,” she said, with the faint echo of a laugh. They had spoken ; something was loosed between them. But he perhaps had never felt it ? The awe and constraint had been all hers—he was merely unhurried, quiet ?

He pulled her closer to him now with a low, broken, endearing phrase. She tried to raise her arms, to lock them round his neck, but they fell backwards, and once more the moonlight faded from her eyes.

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Roger, walking slowly down the Quai Voltaire, with his friend Achille Sureau, was extremely pleased ; the clear air was delicious, and the luminous grey masonry, and the river with its hurrying whorls of green tourmaline. Even the little cigar which he was smoking, somewhat against his habit and inclination, as a concession to his amity with M. Sureau, added, in its harsh richness, something interesting to his sensations. M. Sureau was a critic of brilliant discrimination ; he had such a faculty for saying little things that, in their artless inspiration, seemed utterly unstained by any shortcomings of the human heart or brain, and to have dropped, as it were, like the gentle dew

from heaven, that people hung, breathless with eagerness, whenever his lips were seen to move. Usually, however, he preferred to talk about his canaries, or what he meant to have done in his Alpine rockery ; or sometimes he sat down and wrote neat poetry, which puzzled the devout because it appeared to say so little. His personal impression was one of great enthusiasm ; as he walked he quivered with electric energy from his sharp black beard to his little pointed shoes, covered with pale lavender spats. The ingenuous glee expressed in his every motion made Roger feel, trailing beside him, that he himself was the elderly guardian of some angelic little prodigy ; he felt almost abashed when M. Sureau explained that he thought of having one of the rooms in his new house decorated with a fresco by his friend's nephew ; for Roger was by no means sure that Anthony's capacity, though he approved of its genre, was sufficiently developed to make it suitable for him to be accorded this honour. But M. Sureau was as free from doubts on this as he appeared to be on every other point on which he held any opinion. His reasons for liking Anthony's painting were two-fold. It fascinated him to think he could trace, in the work of a character entirely different from Roger's, and expressed in another form of art, something of that curious, remote, yet intimate grace that commanded his fervent admiration in the former ; some synthesis, of which the key was consanguinity, which he could work out in endless varieties of thought. Secondly, he valued the work of young artists that he considered to be of genuine promise for their very defects rather than for any degree of finished excellence. For one of almost rigidly classical taste, he had the most peculiar of secret sensibilities for the work that shows, in its

imperfections, the fleeting, elusive character of the actual moment, that something the world offers which people are always trying to express, and which makes its presence more poignantly felt when veiled in some only half successful effort to seize it than in some masterpiece that has flashed round it, secured it, and holds it firmly up to view.

"Of course," he was saying, "my new house is not yet in a condition; the previous owners are out, but I am having everything fumigated."

"Fumigated," exclaimed Roger. "How very distressing! Were they——"

"Oh, dear no," said M. Sureau, stepping out with renewed agility. "I don't positively say so. But everybody has around himself an atmosphere—leaves a film on his surroundings? Very well, I don't want the effusion of another person. You may say that I shall create another myself—exactly. And one equally objectionable to another person. I don't deny it; but those who come to my house are those who like my atmosphere—in other words, my friends. They enter into it willingly; it is not disagreeable to them. I need have no compunction: it pleases them since it is natural to me. But to many it would be disagreeable; I should expect it. In the same way, I don't want that of my predecessor—I prefer to make a clean sweep before I begin myself. Certainly, actually to fumigate is fanciful, but then—the satisfaction of ritual! We are all the same, in one way or another."

"Certainly," said Roger, struck by this concession to human weakness in one of such diamond hardness as M. Sureau; but Achille was eternally surprising, he felt, either by being so very unlike himself that the mind was stretched with astonishment, or else so

extremely characteristic of himself that it was struck with a lightning shaft of previous conviction intensified a hundredfold. M. Sureau was arranging to send a word to Anthony as soon as the house should be in a suitable condition ; the little sketch of a corn-field with elm-trees, which he already possessed, he had transplanted, and it now hung in an unfurnished bedroom ; from its effect, he felt able to assure Roger that a fresco by the same hand would suit the house admirably.

They parted, M. Sureau anxious that Roger should come at once and spend the remainder of his visit with him, but Roger murmured that just at present—M. Sureau said that that was perfectly understood, and that he must have the pleasure another time. Then his mannerism, his childish, frowning concentration, his vivacity vanished for one moment. He said, looking into the air behind his companion, and speaking in tones that reached the mind rather than the ear :

“ You have enriched us—France is a debtor to you.”

“ If you say that my contribution is—is worthy, it is too much,” said Roger. For an instant a sense of intangible spires rising in the eternal air, and, invisible behind the grey walls, wide fields and smiling countryside over which echoed their magic names, hovered on the outskirts of his mind.

“ It is worthy,” said M. Sureau ; he bowed farewell, and turned away with a murmured exclamation. Roger stood tapping the curbstone with his stick for so long that a small boy came up to help him across the road, thinking he was blind. As he walked back to the hotel, his head sunk on his breast, he was conscious that, after the quiet and healing process of the last few weeks, the slowly warming current of his being was



returning to its normal speed ; and as he went on, passing into fuller and fuller possession of himself, he found that his thoughts were occupied, as if, subconsciously, they had never left her, with Fanny. The week that in his mind had lengthened out to an indefinite stay was now cut down in a flash to its original dimension ; while his regard for her grew in proportion as, in the clear morning of brisk solitude in the Paris streets sounds of life once more breaking in their full volume on his ears, his desire for her paled and sank down.

He was not conscious of any misdemeanour in having taken her off ; in the limited circle in which he moved, his society, above all, his regard, was so eminently desired, the bestowal of it so avidly watched and discussed ; people were so constantly pressing themselves upon him, or thronging, half held back, so closely about his walk that he hardly dare look up in case his eye was caught and he was involved in half an hour's weariness and distress ; so that, accustomed as he was to being offered everything, it seemed so natural, when he saw something that he really wanted, and that was his for the asking, to take it. As the small flame of passion that his feeling had been drawn up into, subsided, he perceived with keener sensibility the nature of her charm ; it bore, it gained by, objective scrutiny ; so sensitive, so pure, so utterly free from any affectation or conventionality. He returned to the hotel and went up to her room. She was lying almost dressed on her crumpled bed, the clothes curved round her, so that, with her knees drawn up to her chin, she looked like someone lying in a shell. As she had gazed at the painted ceiling, she had felt that never, even in the most piercing moments had she

been deluded. She was not even certain, at that moment, that she would have wished this perfect happiness to be more than transient. If he were to be hers for always, she felt, it would argue that he was something lesser than he was ; he was too high and great for her to be able to support him wholly ; the winged horse, swooping from its aerial pastures, could not remain among the clover. She told herself that she was prepared for everything, to acquiesce without a murmur ; she closed her eyes because the sunlight darting amid the cut-glass lustres hurt them, and dropped instantly into a light sleep, but her cheeks had become perfectly white, as if at that moment her body's sensibility were greater than her mind's.

When she opened her eyes he was sitting by her ; she had not known that the golden haze was to thin out quite so rapidly before them as she was instantly aware by his very presence was the case. But with him still beside her and his tender look wholly upon her, she felt quite composed and sane ; for him, one glance at her pale, unconscious face lying beside his knee had told him that she would be as perfectly behaved at the end as she had been at the beginning.

For the end indeed it must be ; any permanent relationship with her he never considered ; and though if she had been older, or more hardened, or easy going, or indeed anything except what she was, he would have contemplated naturally drifting into the usual sort of intimacy with her, that would be a source of pleasure to them both ; yet as it was he saw quite clearly now that to linger or show compunction would be cruelty ; she might become fixed in her affections and suffer real injury. As it was, he was stirred by compassion. Was he going to give, then, so much pain ?

He tried to think not ; after all, who was he, to suppose so ? An elderly man to whom she had been exquisitely kind. He would never think of her without tenderness, or forget to be grateful. He would do anything for her ; if she had any sort of ambition or desire he would use all his influence to advance her in it ; it would be easy. He touched a piece of hair that had fallen over the sheet ; never, never, he vowed, should the least harm come to her.

She woke suddenly and sat up, and put her arms round his neck. It always seemed to her that after she had received his impression in her mind, the actual feel of his body was that impression made tangible, so utterly different was it from any other flesh. He was poising his weight on his two hands, resting on the bed, so he did not embrace her, but inclined his head over hers. She saw, in one moment of startling lucidity, as if she were looking down a roadway, what was in store for her ; but his having said nothing, her being still so close to him, made the glimpse as one of some unreal country, such as death, into which we know we shall have to go some day. A confused murmur rose to her lips.

“ What’s that ? ” he said impatiently. “ Don’t mutter into my waistcoat. I want to hear what’s going on.” He pulled her hair so that her lips were tilted to the level of his ear, but she only laughed and gave it a little kiss. In the morning light her cheeks had the milky sheen so rarely seen except on the skins of young children. He wanted eagerly as he held her to say something about his morning’s walk, about Surcouf and the current of the Seine. But he checked himself ; had he, perhaps, already, given her too much to remember ?

Few people are so conscious of being literary and artistic as those who are, strictly speaking, neither the one nor the other ; as the society existing on the outskirts of that of artists and men of letters, which finds its chief social pleasure in retailing anecdotes about the latter, referring to them by their Christian names, or, if they can come at them, by the pet names used to them in their families. These people are engaged in a ceaseless whirl of conversation which they cannot stop in case they fall out of the ranks of the *intelligentsia*, and which they cannot vary because, as it is merely a reflection of other people's conversation, it has no organic life of its own.

Anthony Simon, seated behind a curtain studded with spots of looking-glass in Beaky Taylor's studio, wondered whether to be more irritated by the literary or the artistic portion of the company. The former, which excelled in conversation and knew all the Christian names, was dressed with laborious bohemian taste in ear-rings, flat-heeled shoes, side-whiskers, and the most approved shades of mud and poison. The artistic members showed more intelligence in their clothes, he thought, for the men were merely dirty, while the women, who depended for the interest of their lives on being taken about by the men, were dressed without reference to any dictates of snobbishness, with a severely practical exploitation of their charm. On the other hand, the conversation of these people was even more tiresome, he felt, because their egotism, ignorance, profanity, religious mania, and illiteracy poured over the mind in such inextricable confusion that it was impossible to sift and reject what they said as one could so easily reject the remarks of the *intelligentsia*.

He was secretly much alarmed at his own state of mind, which was aroused to the extreme wakefulness of insomnia, and allowed him to see the scene, in which he usually mingled with acquiescence and enjoyment, in such startling clarity that to participate in it was impossible. The party he was shirking behind the curtain was a rather unsuccessful attempt to combine these two elements of pseudo-society ; for Beaky Taylor had lately taken under his wing a lady with one little boy, who belonged to the ranks of the *intelligentsia*, and this liaison was responsible for the discordant presence of so many of them and for the incongruous objects scattered about over the litter proper to the studio. A row of painted animals and birds, with harshly defined, pert attitudes and expressions, adorned the mantelpiece, designed for grown-up people who wanted toys but who could not fill in for themselves the suggestions that make the rough and simple toys of children so mysterious and beautiful. These objects were approached by every guest for whom the hostess was responsible with exclamations of rapture and astonishment. The rhyme-sheets and the coloured reproductions of Van Gogh were accorded a more modified applause, a casually uttered " Rather jolly," or " Great fun," indicating a general recognition that everything was all right. The three dozen books from the various fashionable Presses passed unnoticed, for everybody had the identical row at home, just as they had the requisite lavatory accommodation, and no comment was expected on either feature.

The groups seemed hopelessly cleft apart ; in the dimmer half of the studio Beaky's friends were solacing themselves, while in the circle under the hanging lamp

a young man with a pale face and a smirk, who was in the habit of boasting that he had "some kink" in him which made it impossible for him to put his hat on straight, was relating an anecdote about Roger Simon ; the magic name he uttered securing for him the most flattering attention.

"Well, of course, we all know Roger's views on that point."

A faint spurt of indignation flickered in Anthony's mind. Damn their impertinence ! And, as his mind seemed to have become a looking-glass in which a series of pictures were reflected, independent of his personal interpretation of them, so there slid into it scene after scene, unsought, unconnected, of his early youth and his family. Deborah, sleeping the night with a friend who was on the verge of moving house, and lying in bed in the morning, though the friend was panting to pack up the bed-linen ; positively refusing to move till the men arrived and she was within an ace of being carried down Tottenham Court Road on the top of a furniture van in her nightgown, like some Scriptural allegory in the Tate. It was exceedingly funny to anyone who knew how red and pertinacious his aunt became in such moments, and who could imagine how she must have sat up in bed rather like an infuriated cockatoo, reaching for her pince-nez to glare through them at the abashed removing men. And Henry, with his fingers faintly smelling of disinfectant, explaining a blood test, with that divinely satisfying ease and quietness of the expert ; damned interesting it had been, too, only he had forgotten it—he forgot everything. But what remained was the sense, while that almost murmured explanation had gone on, of being lifted from the ground as in some crane, of surveying the prospect in



one glance, and then being deposited again, with inimitable gentleness and security. And what graces stole into his mind when he closed his eyes ! Lovely Mrs. Stewart, brilliant from the frosty air, coming in to play poker at a time when he had been staying in the house, running upstairs to leave her baby, wrapped in a blue shawl, on the spare-room bed, and after the party, coming up again attended by Athene, tall and willowy, with her hair dressed in that implacable Edwardian manner of a triangle spread out above each temple, and an indefinite knot behind ; exquisitely gracious to Mrs. Stewart and rather apprehensive of the blue bundle ; the movings and laughs and murmurings in the immaculate space of the spare bedroom, with its glazed quilt and empty dressing-table. . . .

He opened his eyes and pushed his head round the curtain.

Oh, God, Oh, God ! why was it that Mrs. Stewart, running out to evening parties, abandoning her baby in the spare bedroom, should yet not jar the mind, should appear so rational in what she did that one never criticised her actions, but only noticed them to admire, and to say, " How like Julia ! " So that her red cheeks and sparkling black eyes and her hasty, gasping, laughing words remained in his mind all these years, though where she was now he of all people had the least idea. While his hostess, whose bulky torso tapering to her legs that were as thin as an animal's, he could see on his right, though she was no doubt an exemplary mother, and had read up Freud, and dressed her child in the most hygienic and cheerful garments, yet to see her standing with her ear-rings and her cigarette-holder, so stridently participating in all this chat about other people, as though there were nothing

of real seriousness in her own existence, no secret well of life in which she bathed and from which she looked out upon the world with some imperceptible reserve which would not impede, but dignify her ; all this, he felt, made her an object not only distasteful, but ludicrous. But though Julia Stewart horrified the married ladies by saying, when her four-year-old son ran away, " Oh, hang, I really can't go after him till after lunch," yet when she and her children sat together in a swing they looked like a Gainsborough portrait group, too bright and loving to exist except as an artist's vision of them.

He leaned his head against the wall and cursed himself for being too feeble to join the collection in the shadows; they at least knew what they were about. Ivan Archer, who was considered as a *pièce de résistance* of the evening, and who didn't care where he went as a rule, because people looked so incredibly lovely when they were dressed up and enjoying themselves, had been dreadfully chagrined at the presence of the *intelligentsia* ; and, gazing round the room in dismay, he saw Anthony's hopeless face, with its little wisp of beard, peeping round the curtain at the far end of the room, like some unhappy genie in the *Arabian Nights*.

" Here, what's all this ? " he exclaimed, making his way to the window. " You're one of the showmen here, you know. But it is a dreadful grouping up, isn't it ? " A grunt, ending in a groan, answered him.

" Oh, dear," said Ivan, " I do think this is terribly funny." He gave a shout of laughter and smothered it with his hand. He was wearing a spruce blue serge suit with a rather overcut appearance like that of a sparrow, and bright brown shoes. How clean, and a real person too ! He sat with his hands clasped between his knees,

with a look that was so penetrating and serious about the eyes and so full of childish enjoyment in the laughing mouth.

"What's that woman saying?" said Anthony.

"There's some art talk going on now," Ivan informed him. "*I* never came across such a gang in all my life."

"They were talking about my uncle just now."

"Oh, well," said Ivan, rather spitefully, "your aunts and uncles are the models of this society, aren't they? They are what all these folk are trying to be. They're remarkable for it."

"They're a darn sight more remarkable for being ladies and gentlemen," said Anthony viciously. "These people haven't got hold of the first thing about it. Not one of them could tell a good public house joke to save their lives," he added, with seeming inconsequence. They both laughed.

"Oh, I say," said Ivan, "it'll never do for us two chaps to be seen roaring away behind the curtains." He got up to rejoin the party, partly because he had a polite mind, and, being rather celebrated, could not bear the idea of behaving as if he were, and partly because so few people of the kind he really liked ever did stay with Anthony.

"Oh, Lord," he groaned, sinking back after his vain effort to detain Ivan by the sleeve. He so badly wanted someone decent to stay with him. "I do feel so damned . . ." he could not tell what exactly it was he did feel, but he saw the door quite close to him. Impelled by something he knew not what, he started up and hurried out into the overgrown little garden. A minute later he was extremely sick in the bushes.

Edwin Stagg had a comfortable income and a two-seater car, and was related to the stepmother who had brought up Fanny ; he therefore considered himself as a suitable person to visit the latter, and came fairly often. If he had not thought it suitable, he would not have done it. He was a very personable young man, extremely fond of dogs, and always ready to do odd jobs in anybody's house because he was more interested in working with his hands than in anything else. He had been cultivated by Ivan Archer, who piqued himself on discovering startling qualities in rather uninteresting people and interpreting them to his less discerning friends. It was sometimes deliberated by those who knew them both, whether he or Ivan were the more completely selfish of the two. Although Ivan's selfishness was leavened with so much personal charm and relieved with childish *naïveté*, Edwin's was the more reliable ; for though the doings of both were guided solely by what each hoped would give him the maximum amount of pleasure, Ivan's desires, being the subtler of the two, were apt to cause him more uncertainty. He was frequently hung up in agonies of indecision ; his afternoon would be poisoned by doubts as to whether he should take out the girl he had asked to dine with him, or whether he should not rather find himself previously engaged and ring up another, who had flashed into his mind with some overpowering memory of how she had stooped down to put on her dancing-shoes, or bought primroses off a coster's barrow ; lighting up such a radiance, that to put up with anybody else seemed to be deliberately dragging down existence to a lower pitch. Edwin's pleasures, being of a simpler nature, caused him much less anxiety ; it was almost always easy for him to decide

whether the day were better for tennis or riding, whether he wanted to dance with his partner or make her sit out with him while he timed the band with his stop-watch, or whether he would prefer to eat his host's lunch when the gong sounded or to set off then for a walk, and have a little cheese and so forth served to him at half-past two. He was, however, a simple and kindly soul, just as Ivan was sweetly righteous, and he drew up his car outside Fanny's door, and went in to ask her out to dinner in a little glow of benevolence and enthusiasm.

Fanny, sitting with her hands clasped in her lap, said she did not think she would, nice as it would have been, because she wasn't hungry.

"Well, no need to eat much," said Edwin in a rather annoyed tone of voice. (It was too late now to ask anyone else, and he hated dining alone.)

"Just a little, light dinner, that's all."

"I really couldn't, thank you very much," she repeated.

"Well, can't you come and sit with me while I have mine, and have some coffee afterwards?"

"Oh," she thought, "can't I come and listen to what went wrong with your car last week, how much you made by selling out your stock, and what you said to the lady who asked you to take her daughter to a *thé dansant*? No, I can't, I can't! Why should I, when I have so much to bear already?"

"Thank you," she said, "but I really mustn't do anything this evening. I've got heaps of letters to write, and I'm very sleepy, too, I shall go to bed early."

"Well, you're making a mistake," Edwin assured her seriously; he was, he felt, quite justifiably put out.

Dinner was the right thing to have at this time, and here she was refusing to have it.

"A great mistake," he added. "It won't do, you know. However . . ." He got up and went to the door. "See you some time later, I suppose." He went noisily down the stairs and slammed the front door after him.

She lay down on the bed and gazed restlessly about the room. It was now the end of the day, and she felt a sharp pang at the thought that her happiness had receded yet another step. She would not allow herself, however, to dwell upon it as something gone. And over and over again she reconstructed in her mind the scene at Victoria, when they had parted, and she, so dazed and numb, had felt nothing, but only seen his last look over his shoulder and heard his "Good-bye."

She had now to reproduce exactly what she had seen and heard, so that she might, in full possession of her senses, explore the significance of it. But the sight and sound wavered, altered, with the mood of the mind that mirrored them, as a surface wavers and changes its design under moving water.

Sometimes she remembered his ambiguous look, grave and neither expressive nor indifferent, and recalled how much she herself had done at the time to prevent his being obliged to say anything that marked the occasion, meeting him more than half-way ; and sometimes his good-bye sounded in her ear with such light and casual intonation that she almost screamed with agony.

"On Saturday afternoon, then, if it is fine," for he had come again, and she wished passionately that the farewell in the tumultuous station had been the last.

"If fine !" he had said, and mentioned something



about Kew Gardens. And though it was all over now, she shrank from remembering that afternoon, overcast, but with fitful gleams. It was not fine, and then, again, it was ; and as the time passed from two to half-past three, and so on to four, the change between resignation and unreasonable hope kept her in a perpetual torment. For when, after the sky had settled into dullness for ten minutes, and she had resolutely composed her mind to a final accepting of its being impossible, the soft little shadows cast by the furniture on the walls suddenly darkened, and a slow, malicious ray stole round the room, growing in brightness until she was forced to go to the window, and again resume the harassing burden of hope and expectation she had found a little relief in setting down. The perpetual, violent alternations between resignation and hope made her feel sick, and so battered that she would welcome anything if the motion would only cease.

“Let the whole vault become stained with inky purple and leave me lying in the shadow of absolute despair, or let it brighten and send shoots of radiance like spears into me, so that I have the single, positive feeling that he has broken his promise and doesn’t care to come !” How much, she thought, in passing, one feels at such times that the mind is a physical structure ; we are permeated through and through with weakness. There is nothing that is untouchable in us ; all our fine feelings are destroyed by a neat blow on the head. When she saw it was five o’clock she felt safe ; the sky could do what it pleased now without affecting her ; it was now past the time when it was possible for him to come. Feeling quite oblivious of everything except a vague relief, she sat down, in a pause, as it were, of life, and at that moment he had come.

Was he really there ?

He sat down beside her ; the weather had been so uncertain, he said, until it was too late. He had taken off his hat, but his tight-waisted, rather long overcoat and his gloves gave him a dressed and ceremonious appearance that was rich and stately. She was almost unable to lift up her eyelids, but when she did look at him he was half-turned away in a fixed and pre-occupied stare that removed him as much as if he had taken his person out of the house. She was encased in ice, too weak to lift up her hands ; in imagining such a scene she would have been forced to throw herself on his breast, but in his actual presence some merciful arrangement of her being made it impossible to do what would agitate or distress him, and she was as securely bound to behave as her inmost feelings, though unguided by any actual words of his, told her that she must, as the prisoner is prevented from deviation in a treadmill. Lying now on her bed, she wondered why she had refused to go out to dinner with him ; though she remembered at the time the faint touch of comfort she had felt in her darkened state from divining that as he stood above her he was approving her for avoiding what would have been a strain on them both. But now, she felt, sitting up, now, she would do anything ! For ten days, to see and hear nothing ! But she kept herself resolutely poised on the present ; the affair was not dead ; she was strung to the highest point of expectation when every moment might bring him forth ; in absolute uncertainty there was at least unfettered hope. She began walking feverishly about the room, tidying it and re-arranging the flowers. It afforded her some consolation to employ herself in keeping her surroundings in perfect order. It was not till some time later that she

could only find relief in lying face downwards, with her arms round her head, shutting in her own thoughts and making a barrier against the absolute emptiness of the room and the house and the street and the surrounding space.

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As the lunch-gong sounded, Roger came into the hall and peered up the stairs to watch for his sisters coming down. He waylaid Athene with a letter that had come from a friend who, during his absence, had spent a night in the house at Roger's suggestion. The letter contained thanks for this convenient hospitality and a hope that the guest had not bored Miss Athene Simon. This plaintive aspiration was so suggestive that Roger confronted her without hesitation.

" ' Kind but vague,' he says you were," he accused her.

" Well, really," said Athene humbly. " I did my best, but I can't do with these people who are so *spirituel* at the breakfast-table." She sat down and unfolded her table-napkin ; her thin and beautiful hands were never manicured, the nails being merely cut straight across the top, and this inelegant treatment seemed to enhance their gracefulness. She laid the napkin across her knees without raising her eyes, and he had one of his fleeting recognitions of her incomparable ways. He could not go on scolding her ; she and the unfortunate gentleman had given such illuminating sketches of each other's behaviour that he could not conceal his enjoyment of the imagined scene.

The maid carved for them at the sideboard, as Roger did not undertake these labours, and their lunch proceeded ; the thin green silk curtains and the

trees outside gave the windows a clear greenish light, rather as if they had been under the sea. They presented, in this retired and private scene, that aspect of unapproachableness that is only created by remarkable people's doing simple and ordinary things. While within a few streets of them several ménages, who all regarded the Simons as the *ne plus ultra* of the life they themselves endeavoured to lead, were at this very moment lunching on check tablecloths or on none at all, on bread and cheese and products in cans bearing German and Italian labels, served on a heterogeneous collection of art china plates with dubious yellowish spoons and forks, the Simons in their unconscious stateliness were seated round their plain and spotless white tablecloth eating roast beef, which presently gave way to that much more uncommon object, a properly cooked milk-pudding.

"I am really very much concerned about Anthony," said Deborah suddenly. Athene went on eating milk-pudding, but Roger said, "Yes, certainly. I really don't know, at all!"

"Such a condition!" exclaimed Deborah.

"Have you been visiting him?" enquired Athene.

"I looked in this morning. Absolutely shocking; chaos everywhere, the windows shut tight, and a most abominable smell coming from a jar of moth-balls on the mantelpiece."

"Oh, those!" said Roger meditatively. "No, I think those must have been boiled sweets. I was given one last time I went there."

"I hope you escaped that?" said Athene.

"Oh, yes," replied Deborah. "He wasn't in a condition to show any hospitality. He was simply lying down with his mouth open and his hands trailing on

the floor. If he's going to be able to do this work for M. Sureau by the time the house is ready, something will simply have to be done to or for him. . . ."

"I have implored him time and again to make some effort to keep the ribs under his skin," said Roger agitatedly, "but unless someone is there to see that he eats proper food and so forth . . . I should have thought Lydia, perhaps . . ."

"Poor child, I don't think that would be the least use," murmured Athene.

"It really requires someone perpetually on the spot to combat his inertia for him," said Deborah. "I left a large tin of malted milk beside the moth-balls—I hope that it may share his attentions with them."

Athene laughed softly.

"James is away," said Roger, frowning.

"My dear Roger," said Athene hastily, perhaps foreseeing some quixotic imprudence in her brother and anxious to forestall it for everyone's sake. "You know that we have discussed this *innumerable* times already. We have all, at different times, done our best for Anthony, and you know with what result. *I* am extremely sorry about it ; I do think he has talent, and one can't help being fond of him. But he is . . . simply hopeless."

There was an uncomfortable silence ; her words expressed so concrete a fact that, try as they might to shape it and clip it with their resolution and cast a glow over it with kindly sentiment, it remained, as she had said, simply hopeless. It seemed extraordinary that so youthful and tenuous a creature could present such insuperable difficulties to these very capable and intelligent elderly people ; it was not that they seriously objected to Anthony's disreputable way of living ; they

thought his taste deplorable, but they themselves were so mondaine with their intellectuality, of so sensitive and luxurious a receptivity, that they were sympathetic to a very wide range of pleasures in other people. It was his mollusc-like combination of limpness and adhesiveness that made Anthony such an affliction, and the shreds and touches of their own familiar grace and liveliness, the hints of their own particular spirit, that made his feeble presence not only tiresome, but a distracting torment. It was understood that if Anthony came round looking as if he had something to say, he might be received with cordiality, but that if he came round quite clearly without anything to say, he had to be turned about and sent off again immediately. In the silence they were so acutely conscious of all this that with one accord they rose from the table and started to talk of different things. Roger was anxious to talk to one of his friends about the mounting of some silk paintings, and he and Deborah proposed visiting him and staying to tea there ; they looked forward with some pleasure to the afternoon as they would enjoy a few very helpful remarks on *Chinoiserie*, and at the same time be agreeably conscious of conferring extreme delight by their mere presence on the gentle little man who adored them. Athene rather envied them their prospect of information, worship, and priceless China tea ; she herself was pledged to visit the office of that association which Ivan Archer had described as existing to prove that women were superior to men. The prospect damped her a little, and, as she put on her fur coat and her hat without looking in the glass and buttoned up her suède gloves, she was no longer the impressive, close-lipped lady of the lunch-table who had so completely disposed of poor Anthony ; a subtle



change had invaded her ; she walked gathered up into herself as if fearful of some wounding contact ; the light, firm insolence of her manner, like the rippling of some cold and merry piece of Bach, had disappeared, and her silence suggested depth and shyness and dim confusions ; an appearance that often prompted people who did not know her to encourage her in conversation, and to explain things to her that they thought it would be nice for her to know about. She was often, when wearing this appearance, given confidential biographies, by complete strangers, of writers and politicians she had known from her childhood ; she always received them with polite and grateful attention, and would tax the subject next time she saw him with having led such a double existence.

She shivered as she settled herself in the corner of a taxi ; and regretted the time when she had really thought that it was possible to work some real change in people by the forces of enlightenment ; then it had been far less irksome to do one's duty by them. A resignation so complete as to be hardly cynical had not excused her from going on doing what she could, but it had made it an increasing burden, and it was only a perpetual curiosity, the insatiable interest in what life was always offering at every moment, of a mind that had developed but never aged, that supported her through the trying scenes of which so great a portion of existence is composed.

Not but what, she thought, tucking her chin as far as it would go into her fur collar, she was very fond of Alice. She would quite like to have a chat with her when it came to it. But it was this coming to things that was so hard on an elderly lady who was almost always chilly and inveterately disposed to be idle after lunch.

Miss Alice Corder reigned in a neat office which was always warm with a purring little gas-fire, and associated itself in the mind as much with her own little buff spats and tea brought in punctually at quarter to four as with the piles and piles of memoranda concerning the destinies of the young ladies who availed themselves of Miss Corder's assistance in getting themselves afloat in life. Miss Corder herself was a rather remarkable lady. Her figure was trim and comfortable ; her soft and pink, finely wrinkled face was distinguished by a curved nose like a little beak and a pair of extremely penetrating blue eyes. Her middle-aged comfortable-ness, combined with the steel-like quality of efficiency with which she controlled the affairs under her charge, gave the office an air of solidity, and redeemed it from that deplorable atmosphere of earnestness and shrillness that so often associates itself with an organisation entirely controlled by women.

There could be no doubt but that Miss Corder, for all her severity and the impersonal nature of her dealings, thoroughly believed in the value of the work she did ; but the ladies associated with her were mistrustful of Miss Athene Simon, whose attitude appeared to them ambiguous. They did not appreciate the service of her intelligence, although they grudgingly admitted the value of her name. Miss Corder herself was never known to say anything about her to her colleagues, but merely mentioned her when it was necessary with a direct seriousness and a glance from her piercing eyes that discouraged comment in anybody else ; nor did she ever make any demonstration of regard to Athene, but she welcomed her with a silent cordiality, and, shelving the business of arranging to examine young persons in modern languages with a view to recommending them

to posts abroad, she began at once to talk to her about the Mozart season just opening at a theatre in the suburbs.

They agreed that English people do not know how to play Mozart, and exchanged their reminiscences of German concerts with great enthusiasm ; then they discussed the matter in hand, and Miss Simon said a little uncertainly, " Would you like me to assist with the examining ? Any odd job, you know . . ." with a simplicity that could only be fully appreciated by someone who, like Miss Corder, knew that she had command of perfect French, German, and Italian, to say nothing of more English than most people acquire in a lifetime. Miss Corder expressed her thanks with a weight of sincerity and restrained warmth. Then she rang the little bell on her desk, and, after the slight vibration of this moment, the two ladies settled down to the prospect of afternoon tea.

At the sound of the bell, Fanny rose rather thankfully from a typewriter in the outer office and went into a little pantry on the stairs of the Georgian house which now sheltered the Association. This contained a sink and a single row of crockery with a small gas-ring. She took down the little tea-tray and put two cups on it because she knew Miss Corder had a visitor, and waited for the kettle to boil, as she idly watched the creeper-leaves quivering outside the strip of window. A calendar advertising boot polish was for some reason hanging on the handle of the cupboard above the sink, and two brightly painted birds flying across the corner of it caught her eye, before she could turn away. She already felt something swiftly travelling up the obscure avenues of her mind into consciousness, so that she almost held her breath in anticipation of something painful. The

opening lines of a song heard in the near past repeated themselves in her inward ear :

*Les diamants chez nous sont innombrables.  
Les perles dans nos mers sont incalculables.  
L'Inde ! Terre des merveilles . . .*

And she remembered that at some point later in the song the foliage parted and a bird of brilliant plumage flew out. How piercingly sweet and high the notes had been, blending in the mind the image of sparkling jewels and ambrosial groves with shoots and cascades of silver sound ! She closed her eyes in anguish, and was roused by the spurt and hiss of the boiling kettle. She made the tea and carried it carefully into the office, keeping her head bent to see that the milk did not slop over the edge of the jug. Miss Simon was very kindly disposed towards the young in general, and particularly attracted by the way their hair was cut in to the nape of their little necks, the short round necklaces and hip-belts they wore. And Miss Corder felt that the appearance of this shy, deferential young person with the tea-tray enhanced the amenity of the office. Fanny looked up as she put the tray on the table and met Miss Simon's mild, penetrating gaze. She had seen her several times before, though never at quite such close quarters. She was conscious of nothing for the first moment except that she was in the presence of a great lady ; then Miss Corder's movements and tones impressed themselves with a new dignity and incisiveness upon her preoccupiedness. She remembered with a sudden thrilling this sensation of how one's perceptions were made keener, one's admiration of surroundings expanded and fed by being in a certain company, and meanwhile a soft, bare hand had been put into

hers and the voice said, " I don't think we have ever spoken to each other, have we ? " As she looked at the face, so startling and unfamiliar, the resemblance gradually stole forth from it like a reflection forming in the broken waters of a pool. The hand was taken away and something very charming was said. When she stood outside the door her first recognisable sensation was of pleasure, rapidly growing to the familiar winged delight ; the miraculous had come close again.

For many days her feelings withdrew themselves from the idea of Roger to be met or heard of, and found relief for the shyness that his withdrawal of himself occasioned in her mind in thinking of his sister instead. The same terrible uncertainty invested her movements also—there was no definite time for her to visit Miss Corder, but it so happened that at this time her visits were fairly frequent. Even then she might never be seen on her passage to and from the inner office, and her visit might happen at any other hour than tea-time. Nevertheless, glimpses in the office and words exchanged on pavements kept her idea firmly before her in Fanny's mind ; and it was an unconsciously paid tribute to Miss Simon that when one of these fleeting moments, so ardently and continually desired, did occur, their effect was not to add to Fanny's uneasiness ; it was rather in the nature of an exquisite but short-lived relief, like a drink of water ; and for the rest of the day she was calm and satisfied and a little sleepy.

Only at one moment in the day could she entertain the thought of Roger. When she woke up each morning her thoughts instantly reverted to him, and before she had fully grasped the calamitous existence before her the mere sense of the mind's turning towards the beloved object gave her a tender and passionate pleasure ;

sometimes in the quiet and half-darkness she could nurse it for a second or two, till the sound of the milkman was heard or something else broke the spell of oblivion. When she got up she was able to scatter the newly awakened pain into hundreds of minor hopes and pangs and to lose sight of it in the turmoil of the day, although it remained behind, to darken it.

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Helena Braithwaite was standing by the glass counter of a Bond Street jeweller ; she had taken off her gloves and was examining rings with large pale and brilliant stones ; an enormous aquamarine, a pale sapphire, a cluster of peridots, a green tourmaline set in diamonds. The whole tray shimmered like April dew ; the perplexing task was to see how much of the beauty rested in the collection and how much was accounted for by each individual stone, and, of the stones, which one held the greatest piece of this intangible loveliness. In her indecision she turned round at the subdued sound of someone's approaching over the thick carpet, and met Ivan Archer coming in with a girl who was at once overborne with shyness when he started to talk to the tall and wonderfully dressed young lady. He explained to Helena that he wanted to do a drawing of Daphne ; the unhappy Daphne, not knowing whether this constituted an introduction or not, shifted from one foot to the other and felt that she looked a fool and that the assistants must be despising her for being so shabbily dressed ; he was having a dress made for her out of a curtain, Helena would remember it—and she had to have a yellow necklace. The assistant, listening respectfully, adroitly slid a tray of amber and cornelian beads on to the counter.



"Some of these look good," said Ivan ; in the middle of his own concerns he looked at her tray with a single moment's detachment.

"That's the one you want out of that lot," he said, pointing to the tourmaline. She picked it up and slipped it on her hand. It was ; she knew at once that she had plucked out the heart of that array of loveliness. As she held up her hand to the light she thought :

"How wonderful this will look when I am eating bread and cheese under a hedge." She was extremely grateful to him, and turned her attention to the necklaces in flattering interest. The girl could not do anything but nervously admire whatever Ivan picked up ; he finally decided, however, that none of them would do, and went out of the shop, though she herself would have been enraptured with any of them. On the pavement he said he had to be off, and asked Daphne where she wanted to get to.

"It's all right, thank you," she replied miserably, and took leave, blushing furiously as she walked away, thinking how wonderful it was to be able to walk out of a smart shop like that without buying anything, to say about the terrifying assistants that the chaps didn't know their business, and thinking at the same time how beautifully Helena was dressed and hating her for not having said more to her.

Helena meanwhile was anxious to speak to Ivan, which had perhaps made her a little brusque. She knew very little actually of what went on among her various friends because she was very much occupied with one or two people, but she was acutely sympathetic and discerning in matters within the reach of her experience, and she was filled with an undefined but positive apprehension on Fanny's account. She knew from being

with her now and again what moments of the girl's day had interested her most ; she discovered instantly if she had met someone who had given her pleasure. Various threads that she had gathered occasionally were suddenly woven together in her mind when Fanny had come to supper, and in a pause when she herself was arranging a light she heard her say under her breath :

“ Roger.” The sound was as tiny as it was unmistakable, and, coupled with Fanny's looks and the complete absence of that little flow of conversation that she was always encouraged into by being alone with someone she knew and liked, her manner of sitting silently and languidly, while seeming to take such comfort in the mere presence of a friend (on one occasion lately she had gone to sleep sitting in an armchair), all this made her quite certain of something of the truth. It was interesting to see, as one moved about, how the people with whom others were in love could be traced by little signs in the behaviour of the latter ; when a girl started to wear coral bracelets and say she adored macaroons one might suspect Ivan Archer even before one heard the particular works of art and literature that she strenuously admired, or detected an almost desperate look in the eye that betokened an increasing effort to convince other people that Ivan was not only infallible in matters of æsthetic judgment, but a purely righteous and unselfish man. But this remote, silent air, and an agitation which was yet oddly mixed with some underlying quality of unchangingness : if one were to explore that, it would lead along endless paths of interesting revelation. In any case, it betokened something rather unfamiliar and alarming ; she wanted to know somebody else's opinion, because she felt so sorry and concerned about it.

"Have you seen Fanny lately?" she asked.

"Fanny?" said Ivan. "Yes, I saw her a night or two ago."

"I'm afraid she's——" Helena hesitated; she did not want to suggest an idea to him. "Not very well," she concluded.

"Sorry about that," said Ivan. "Why doesn't she see one of these Wimpole Street fellows?"

Helena felt herself becoming irritated; she had put the affair on a false basis.

"She's unhappy, I think," she said boldly.

"Girls always have some silly fad or other," said Ivan. "Look at the green braces on that dog! Don't they look damn good?" Helena looked resentfully at a chow, harnessed in green leather, that was getting out of a Rolls Royce. "I detest that sort of unintelligent magnificence," she said, meaning her remark to apply to the car, which certainly had the air of belonging to someone rather rich and silly. Ivan, however, naturally disdained what he took to be her rejection of the dog as a very superb sight on a fine morning.

"I'm very much afraid she's crossed in love," she continued.

"Won't do her any harm," he said coarsely.

"But I tell you she's very unhappy," cried Helena.

"Oh, yes," he said scornfully. "We all know what that means with girls."

"You don't know," she exclaimed furiously. "You haven't the least idea."

"My dear girl," said Ivan, with bland good temper, "if I were as unhappy as all these girls are said to be, the stars would go black and the earth tremble underneath your feet. These girls have no more idea of what it is to be *really* unhappy, or really in love, than a can of

tepid water poured over your back can give you an idea of a volcano erupting."

"Ivan," said Helena, "do for once just believe something which you can't understand, simply because it's told you by somebody who can." . . . He raised his eyebrows and laughed gaily. "I tell you," she continued, finding it more and more difficult to be impressive in the face of such good-natured imperviousness, "that she is terribly unhappy, and as a friend, or simply as a decent person, you ought to be sorry about it."

"Well," said Ivan, "if she is terribly unhappy, I think one ought to be glad. It's one up to her that she can be, isn't it?"

"But," she said, "can you really think of a person's being unhappy without being personally sorry and wanting to help them?"

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick," said Ivan calmly. "Wretched little girls like Fanny simply go about asking for it; she's got no more sense than a chicken; and if she really has fallen in love as you say—well, it's all to the good. You can't want to stop the course of events, can you? Besides, if you throw a cat up into the air it comes down on its feet without having to study aeronautics."

"Oh, my God, my God!" she thought. "I could strangle you!" He admired her more than he usually did, standing on the curb and pulling at her fur-trimmed gloves, so youthful and tall and managng. He hailed a taxi; "Let me drive you somewhere," he said. She got in beside him, not conscious of any more rancour, but completely dissolved, unable to piece together any of her views or feelings; she sat flushed, her cheeks like pomegranates under her yellow hair,

perplexed like a child, open-mouthed and frowning. Ivan leaned forward staring out of the windows at the passers-by.

"I shouldn't worry about her," he said over his shoulder. "I sent her an invitation to a party the Churton people are giving to-morrow night to advertise their season ; it ought to be rather good. Why don't you come ? There'll be a lot of your sort there—smiling down their noses."

"You absolutely mistake me," she said urgently. "I don't belong to that sort at all."

"Not by nature," he agreed, "but I sometimes suspect you of hankering after them." He saw she was looking offended. But she was so weighed down by the utter impossibility of trying to permeate the solid, glowing globe of Ivan's mentality with any argument that would lead him to appreciate her point of view that she resigned herself to looking at the world from his angle, so different from her own that it at least afforded interest. It reminded her of an Italian print in her father's bathroom entitled "Mondo Reverso." His observations on what came in the way were so perceptive and so heartless that while she was in his company, partaking of that curious and rather exhilarating freedom from moral responsibility that seemed to emanate from him, she could be heartlessly amused, her own instincts in abeyance, even when he pointed to a group of blind beggars playing a little band on the curb, and cried with immense glee and gusto :

"Look, they're all blind. D'you see that ? "

When she got out at her destination, he said in a friendly manner, "Well, I'm glad to have seen you, and to have stopped all this bickering and wrangling for once. I think we get on better when we're by

ourselves ; when the place is messed up with other people we seem to assimilate bits of the crowd, and we're working a couple of puppets at each other instead of talking ourselves." He seemed to think they had been in complete agreement. As he flashed away and left her solitary in the hurrying street, the whole contents of the last hour were wiped away from her mind. Life is so much a business of passing from one thing to the next, she thought, fortunately. Blue hills and groves of brown trees and fields milky with chalk surrounded her mind ; she was going into Hertfordshire for the weekend in the sidecar of a young man whom all her friends thought not nearly good enough for her. " Marvellous," she thought ; " I'm too happy." That was partly why she had declined the party.

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But Fanny dressed for it the next evening, blushing so much that she alarmed herself. She could not exactly guess who would be there, but she knew that invitations had been sent to everybody who had any power to disturb her peace of mind. She drew on a pair of pale pink silk stockings and wondered whether, after all, what she was likely to go through would be worth anything she would be likely to enjoy : she knew, however, that she might as well save herself the labour of speculation, for she had no power to restrain herself from going. Also, when a person is young, the idea that a party will be a complete failure, though readily admitted as probable, is seldom quite believed.

With older people the case appears to be different. As the clock struck half-past eight Miss Athene Simon, wrapped in a dark red scarf and with an expression betokening deep resignation to the will of Providence,



came downstairs and climbed into the car in which her family had been waiting for ten minutes. She had been invited to tea with a young student of London University who admired her frantically, and who was found by her on her entry struggling in a frenzy of impotence with his fire, which smoked persistently and gave out no heat whatever. A piece of sacking was lying in the grate, with a paper bag of muffins and some butter in a saucer. His horror was, however, presently dissipated by her cheerful and gentle demeanour. She said the day was so warm for the time of year that one hardly seemed to want a fire ; all the same, she took off her pale grey gloves, and, kneeling on the hearth-rug, murmured :

“ This sometimes does it.” He did not see what she did, but almost at once clear, bright flames began to draw up, and he was able—scarlet, smutty, and exhausted—to turn his attention to the condition of the grate.

“ Muffins ! ” she said. “ How comforting. Shall I put the butter on while you toast them ? ”

Two hours later he showed her downstairs, blissfully happy and feeling he had never appeared to such advantage. When she got home, however, she fell into a very languid condition, and spoke to her maid quite sharply about the temperature of her hot water.

The party, tightly packed together and rolling away on wheels, consisted of James and Henry and Deborah. Athene sat in a corner, sometimes lifting a hand to press the newly waved hair at the back of her neck, but staring out of the window and thinking principally that Roger was away and had seemed to be so often lately ; they all thought she was in remarkably elegant looks, but they did not bother her by saying so as she

seemed preoccupied. Henry, who was always artlessly pleased to be there when they were all together, said :

“ Well, I think we all look very nice.” James praised the handsomeness of Deborah’s dress ; she went in for dressing rather more than the others did, and, though her clothes were neither fashionable nor particularly becoming, they had an air of handsomeness. She was in lively spirits, for she enjoyed parties extremely. They chattered incoherently, and Henry continued, “ I hope they give us a good deal to eat. I haven’t had any dinner.”

Everyone at once abused his stupidity and asked why not ? He replied merely that he had had a heavy day and had not got off in time. It was characteristic of him that he did not trouble them with any details. When they arrived and climbed out they found the party set out in several rooms lined with gilt and red velvet and decorated with exotic greenery. The promoters of the Churton Gallery were not in evidence, but several of its patrons were standing about, surrounded each by his own group of guests, who were all very lively and vivacious ; it looked as if the evening would be a success. Henry, supported by Deborah, at once disappeared in the direction of the supper-room, which was resplendent with bowls and dishes piled with chicken and mayonnaise and sandwiches and caviare, and glossy-looking confectionery and drink in tall, frosted glass vessels. A perpetual noise of talking rose from everywhere, and already the window-panes that showed between the curtains were slightly misted over.

Athene spoke to one or two people who hurried up, and then sat down in a corner ; she espied Anthony rather flushed and standing among several young people, and waved her hand to him ; she was glad to

see him as he would be able to tell her who all the indeterminate people were, should she wish to know, and he on his side was delighted. He leaned over her chair and said he thought it was going to be a very good party and the food was magnificent. She replied by complaining of a draught, and saying that she was dreading to be spoken to by someone looking in her direction ; she added that one of her shoes was hurting her.

" This is no way to go on at a party," said Anthony urgently. They were both in very good humour, and she was most sprightly and gracious to a stout man with a serious face whom he led up to her, and who began to tell her almost immediately about a tour he had made in Spain to investigate the cult of Satanists.

" The days of witchcraft," said the stout man, leaning forwards, " are by no means over. I could tell you things that you'd no more believe——" He stopped, and Miss Simon, feeling that this was very likely, said " Really," in a manner that suggested polite incredulity.

" Ah," said the man, gazing sternly at her, " have you"—he dropped his voice—" ever heard of the Black Mass ? "

Athene, feeling as if she were on the stage, said " No ! " and inclined her ear towards him with an eager smile.

The stout man assumed an air of portentous solemnity, mixed with a stern importance. " The Black Mass consists," he said, " in repeating the Mass backwards. That's the first thing."

" Dear, dear," said Athene, approaching her ear closer to his face.

" Then," he said, " the host is defiled. I could tell

you how, but I won't. Then a man and woman, the high priest and priestess, commit the sexual act on the altar. After that a cat is sacrificed." He paused and stared at her with beetling brows, almost as if she herself had been party to these extravagances.

"But isn't that rather childish," she said mildly.

"You may call it that," he said. "But it's a sign of what civilisation has brought us to."

"Do you really think so?" said Miss Simon wonderingly.

"Certainly," he said. "If men and women—if men and women—could *behave—as* men and women . . ."

"They wouldn't feel this urge to sacrifice cats, you think," she suggested. He looked at her suspiciously, and, with a shake of the head, turned away; a second later his broad back was to be seen quivering with indignation as he retailed the excesses of the Satanists to a listener on a sofa. She wavered away from her dreaded assailant, a gentleman who liked to tell her how much he knew about English poetry, whom she saw rapidly advancing, and, catching sight of Anthony overtopping some bright heads, went into the next room. An orchestra had been prevailed upon to play a dance-tune, and in the middle of the mirror-like floor Anthony and several of his friends were dancing; Deborah was among the dancers, red and delighted, rather sliding about and exclaiming, but adding very much to the gaiety of the proceedings merely by being so very much pleased with them herself. Athene joined Henry and James, who were sitting by the wall; Anthony was dancing with Fanny. She had been half pleased and half shocked at the antics of Deborah, and, her cheeks being bright pink, she looked really pretty. At a party like this everyone who came into the orbit

of conversation seemed to take fire and shoot off flakes of brilliance ; everything was forgotten except the stimulus of talking ; the party marked a high-water mark in their sensations. But the Simons, even though the best part of it was around them, seemed to come down rather than to spring up to the event ; it was not that they did not participate. The extraordinary lines of their faces, with the arched brows, were shown up brilliantly in little smiles and quiverings. But now that they sat watching the dancers, earnestly trying to see how these steps were done, their feelings of cheerful revelling, if they had them, were concealed.

“ Look at those seaweedy people along the wall,” whispered a girl in a scrap of a green dress to Fanny. She turned her eyes on them and turned away ; they sat, pallid, with raised brows and dark, unlighted eyes. The slight bar of physical timidity and self-consciousness that would have prevented their joining the dancers had produced their stern and pale appearance, and, though it was the smallest part of their feelings, it showed the most in their faces. When the dance was over, however, and Deborah had released her panting young man, Anthony led Fanny up to the seated row, but relinquished her on Athene’s putting out her hand and saying, “ Good evening.” Fanny said, “ Good evening,” and stood with a face that seemed just about to change to one either of the highest expectation or deep despondency.

“ Are you enjoying the festive scene ? ” asked Miss Simon, with her curious voice which seemed to vibrate between two strings, a deep one and one high and sweet.

“ Yes, very much, thank you,” answered Fanny, and stood twisting the fold of her dress. She still stood ; she could not go—in any circumstances it would have been

too sudden, nor could she say anything. Miss Simon, who sat with her knees crossed, was contemplating the pointed toe of one slipper.

"I must go," thought Fanny. "I can't stay here." The fractions of seconds floated past like full-blown minutes. The pause was becoming dreadful. "But she must end it if I don't say anything," she thought. Still nothing happened, and each second pressed with a sharper point. At last the bent head was raised. "If you are not engaged, perhaps you would have supper with us? But I expect you're engaged already?"

"No, I am not," said Fanny. "I should love to." She sped away, released, divided between rapture and shame, because it now looked as if she had stood there till Miss Simon was forced to invite her; it would have been better, she felt, to have stayed and softened off the impression by a little general conversation. But I can't help that, she thought, pressing her hands to her burning cheeks as she ran aimlessly into a circle of gilt chairs and brass smoking-tables. Her devotion was so profound that, though she was outwardly shy and nervous, and it was, of course, dreadful to behave improperly before them, yet minor embarrassments could not agitate her as much as she herself would have expected. The fact of being invited to have supper with Athene spread a fan of radiance in her mind, bright in itself, and doubly bright with a concealed glow behind it.

"Oh, here you are," said a voice. "You seem to be getting on all right." Ivan Archer rose up out of a gilt wicker chair, throwing away a cigar-stump. Three young girls in *jeune fille* toilettes, whom he had brought from the country, sat round him in complete silence. He rose and began to talk to Fanny, without any



attempt to include them in the conversation, and, as their solemn faces made her feel slightly hysterical, she could pay no attention to them either.

"It was very nice of you to ask me," she said. She detected a slightly aggrieved note in his voice, and supposed rather rudely to herself that he would have preferred to find her drooping in a corner, to be revived by his august notice.

"You're a nice one, Fanny," he said rebukefully. "Look at all this." He touched the little ornament she wore round her neck, and she at once had the sensation that she was dressed with superior taste ; she smiled at him pleasantly and gratefully. He was glancing round him, and caught sight of Miss Simon sitting surveying the room through her glasses.

"So there's Miss Perky-nosed Simon," he said. Fanny could not resist saying, "What do you think of her?"

He wanted to say that she was just another of the intellectual chatterers ; but even across the room she was so impressive ; her unpowdered face had the distinctive appearance that marked the highly bred in the Victorian era and made them, until they took to the mask of paint which anyone may assume, impossible to imitate. Her elegance, too, was not an affair of beautiful garments that another person could have put on, but an emanation from her singular immaculacy and her personal scrupulousness. These things made her intelligent manners seem to rest on so sure and firm a basis that, as an intelligent man, Ivan could not do himself the outrage of pretending not to recognise her as something more than a chatterer. So he contented himself by saying :

"I'll tell you what she looks like. You know when

people have something the matter with their heads and go to bed with them covered up with towels, full of porridge and lanoline and stuff—well, and when someone takes them in a cup of tea in the morning they sit up looking rather severe and greasy, and very tight about the eyes and mouth, because they're trying to prevent the lanoline running into them ; well, that's what she looks like," Fanny looked tranquilly across the room and then turned to him.

" Well," she said, " does it matter ? "

He was quite staggered.

" No," he said at last. " It doesn't matter." He saw that she had gone quite out of his orbit, into something he did not quite approve ; but he wished her well. Her attitude piqued him, but made her slightly more interesting, though less valuable. He turned back to the three young ladies, who sat with the fixed and superior smile of nervousness on their faces during this little brush with Fanny. She meanwhile was wandering gaily to where Anthony had made a little encampment under a palm-tree with the rest when she was suddenly waylaid by the unexpected apparition of Edwin Stagg.

" Why," she exclaimed, " fancy seeing you here ! "

" Oh, well, you know," said Edwin, " just looked in. Ivan sent me a card. Very strange set-out, this." He leant his two hands on the back of a chair, and continued, " You know that wireless set of mine ? " Fanny's heart sank, but she perched on the edge of a smoking-table and said " Yes ? " interrogatively ; after all, there would not be many people here to whom Edwin could talk with any freedom, and she did not want him to feel out of it. He began at once a highly technical description, while she glanced about uneasily. This was only the exposition, so she could safely

wander ; her exclamations would not be called for until the next stage was reached. Out of the corner of her eye she could see James and Athene in conversation with three artists ; the artists' faces appeared to move slowly, while the brother and sister's glances flashed round the group like the spot reflection of a mirror over walls and ceiling.

" Well, I said to the man, what d'you call this ? I've never seen anything like it before, and he said it's the new crystal. They're all got up like that now."

" I see," said Fanny. She turned her neck resignedly towards Edwin, and wondered why it was that he regarded an ignorance of machinery and a disinclination to learn anything about it almost in the light of a moral shortcoming. Anthony, meanwhile, looking backwards from the group who were balancing ice-dishes and coffee-cups on their knees, was struck by the manner in which she was allowing this man to talk to her, when he felt sure she would very much rather be elsewhere. As he glanced furtively at his own circle he imagined the gaucherie or rudeness or coldness that would have been displayed by the best-mannered members of it in similar circumstances, and began to wonder whether this girl was not someone that he would like to know better. He determined to regain her, anyhow, from the clutches of this fellow ; but as he advanced, the perpetually changing surface of the party had separated them, and, while Edwin was happily conversing with a young man who was thinking of installing a wireless set in a garden shed, Fanny found herself behind the curtain of an oriel window with a white-bearded old gentleman who was a distinguished expert on ceramics.

" Youth and beauty," said the old gentleman, and

proceeded in a strain of compliment and allusion, ending with the remark that it was time for little girls to be in bed, which had no connection whatever with the living and breathing creature by his side ; the more distinguished and prosperous old gentlemen are in their own sphere, thought Fanny, the less they seem to have any idea that young people have a life at all ; I could talk naturally to an elderly gardener, but I can't say anything to this person whatever. However, it was not necessary to say very much, as the old gentleman kept up a consistent monologue, a happy blend of the paternal and the arch ; it was a little difficult to catch exactly what he said because he spoke so rapidly, and it was altogether very tiresome, but she reproached herself for being impatient with an old man, and hoped he wouldn't be hurt that she tried to draw away her hand when he pressed it to a very hot and quaking region of his waistcoat. Her effort proved unsuccessful, however, and the comments she had tried to suppress crowded into her mind with fierce indignation—how dared he think, hot, malodorous, futile as he was, that his advances could be anything but disgusting ? He ought to realise what he smelt like ! She struggled, but she was stuck fast in one of those nightmares that occasionally creep out from the region of phantasy and blot the living air. The burning and bristly kisses on her neck and the grasp of those dry, burning hands lingered on her even when she had broken away ; she pressed her hands over her heart, and when they met the heat on her satin bodice she thought for one moment that she must faint or be sick or jump out of one of the windows.

Then, like a ray of moonlight, a night breeze sighing on a moor, she remembered her invitation to supper ;

and her extremity had been such that she thought of Roger and of Athene without shame ; she was soothed and consoled past thought by the sense of what they would have felt for her had they known ; they would never know and Roger was lost to outer life ; but Miss Simon's presence and her invitation acted as the unconscious medium, bringing her into the safety of that divine, restoring love.

For one dreadful moment she caught sight of the back of her horror, at the other end of the room ; then she boldly sought out Athene ; people were already going into the supper-room and it was time. She threaded her way quickly across the intervening space, and paused two steps from where Miss Simon was standing in conversation with an artist of her acquaintance. Being a little behind her, Fanny stood and looked at her unconcernedly ; when, with a suddenness that made her jump, Edwin Stagg's voice at her side said, " Come along and have some supper."

" Thank you," she said, " but Miss Simon has asked me to join her party." Detached from her conversation, Athene turned round, and, seeing a young man anxious to carry the young lady off, she said gently and negligently :

" Oh, don't bother about that ; I'm sure you ought to go with this gentleman," and turned again for a last word with the man beside her.

Fanny stood still a moment, senselessly refusing to believe her ears ; then Edwin's voice in satisfied accents remarked :

" Well, come along then." She gave him a look that made him think she must be going off her head, and sprang away, pushing through the crowd till she reached the top of a wide staircase. She knew that

people were staring at her, but in that moment she experienced complete indifference to everyone who did not bear that striking and familiar look ; she made no attempt to check her sobs or to hide the tears raining down her face ; she abandoned herself in the crowded place as helplessly as the castaway on a deserted shore who sees the sail he thought approaching him disappear over the horizon. The people were indeed like trees, through which she fled to hide herself from what she felt she must never see again. As she came down the last flight of the stairs, unable to see where she was going, she found herself stopped ; someone took hold of her and looked down into her face. Her distress was so great that her hold on the outside world had become confused, and when she saw a face familiar though unknown, and heard the tones of that voice from which she was flying, she accepted it without protest, as if she had met it in a dream. She was conscious of making assurances and refusals, and of getting into a taxi without having to bother where it came from, and of being alone.

“Athene,” said Henry sternly, appearing before her in the supper-room, “what did you say to that little girl ?”

“What little girl ?” enquired Miss Simon, with some asperity ; she disliked being called upon suddenly to account for what she said or did.

“The one in the pink dress,” said Henry. “I met her in a perfect passion of tears, and she said that it was nothing, and she was quite used to it, and she did not usually give way to it, and that she couldn’t go on living any longer.”

“Well,” ejaculated Miss Simon helplessly, “what a recital !”



"Yes," said Henry agitatedly, "but it was shocking, and if anything were said or done it was exceedingly unkind, and we ought to be ashamed of ourselves."

"Really, Henry," exclaimed Athene, "you are being very tiresome ! I said nothing whatever ! Am I to be responsible for all the little girls that may burst into tears on your shoulder ? "

"Well, well," said Henry resignedly, "I didn't mean to interfere." The expression of his sister's gaze made him aware of his tactlessness, and plunged him into confusion. But Athene, though put out, and really not seeing what there had been to provoke such agitation, was at the same time rather contrite ; she had, as a rule, compassion on the young, and she was, besides, very sensitive to rebuke from Henry, whom she loved dearly ; she supposed she had not been quite cordial enough, though at the same time she felt sure that nothing she herself had done, or omitted to do, was the real cause of the trouble. However, she looked towards Henry to say something, but he was farther down the table, pouring out cider cup for a very intense lady in mauve pearls, while the stout gentleman stood behind them explaining that Marvell was all an affair of fingers and thumbs, but that in his own contracted sphere he was undoubtedly greater than Wordsworth. Henry was not so much accustomed to parties as the rest of his family, and this sort of conversation threw him into agonies ; he came back to Athene at once and stood behind her chair, looking very grave and stately, until it was time to go. When they were taking off their wraps in their own house, Athene turned to him and said :

"Well, I am going to see Alice to-morrow. I will look in on your Miss Arne"—thus delicately shifting

the whole affair on to Henry's shoulder. Henry said it was of course a nervous business for young people to go to such parties as these, where they probably admired the older people. Catastrophes were likely to happen ; he expected she would have got over whatever it was by the morning, but it would be very nice all the same if Athene were to see her.

But on the next day Athene went out of town unexpectedly. A postcard—a picture of a bunch of violets and a distant view of a church—came from Roger from Somerset saying that the primroses were out in the lanes and the weather was perfect, and would she not come down for a day or two. He would meet the 11.10 from Waterloo ; so she arose hurriedly and took it.



Roger had found a little cottage which seemed to be, in the way of fires, clean sheets, and good cooking, everything that could be desired. He doted on the place, and the sound at night of the long stream murmuring through its valley and the faint rustle of the trees that plumed the bases of the hills on every side. For several days he had been completely happy, and idle in the intervals of planning out a little monograph on the Continental vogue of English romantic writers in the eighteenth century, which he felt was going on in quite the right way. Now, unfortunately, a cottage between his own and the high road had been taken by an elementary schoolmaster and his wife and sister, all of them extremely well informed, robust, and apt to tell people on the smallest provocation that they themselves had no nonsense about them, and to involve the unwary in sawing up trees or taking violent walks across the neighbouring hills. The married lady had at once

identified Roger from a photograph in the *Weekly Graphic* and a conversation with his landlady, and as they had all three read the *Life of Diderot* from the circulating library—for they were abreast of the times in serious reading—they were prepared to enter into conversation with him at every opportunity.

“Ah, I enjoyed your book, Mr. Simon,” said Mrs. Hodges, leaning over a gate. “Many a queer little ironical twist there was in it.”

Roger said shyly and politely that he was very glad she had liked it, and had disappeared almost before she realised that there was nothing in front of her but an elm-tree in the field. He was very queer, they thought, always walking about with his chin on his breast, and never seeing you unless you hailed him.

“ . . . in a great long beard and a pair of very old flannel trousers,” he heard himself described to a newcomer as he passed up the lane behind the garden wall. He was not only busy with a subtle train of thought, a pattern of delicate and exquisitely wrought associations, which made interruptions of a crude and jarring nature really intolerable, but he had a legacy from his childhood—the child’s susceptibility to good-natured but painful comment, the tones of loud-voiced and cheerful insensibility proclaiming him as queer.

“Damnation ! Why shouldn’t I wear old flannel trousers ? ” he thought, walking up the lane. “What do they expect me to wear on a holiday ? ” He recollected that the schoolmaster wore shorts and turn-down stockings.

“Well, well,” he thought, settling himself in the little window of his sitting-room and gazing up the hillside while the delicious murmurs slowly reached his ear. “The place ! The adorable place ! ”

But as he was sitting that evening with his pipe and book and a lamp on a little round table covered with a red cloth, and the murmurs of the valley were sharpened by the shivering and sighing of some reeds by a tarn, until his nerves were thrilled almost to pain and he felt that something which he had been waiting for was just about to come out of his mind, the party suddenly burst into his room, the husband brusque, the two ladies vociferous, to suggest that he should come down and play bridge with them.

As it was discovered that he could not play bridge, and was afraid he was too stupid to learn and would merely irritate people who were so expert, they stayed and chattered for an hour and a half, and then said they must be turning in, and that he must come and look them up some time soon. Roger said good-bye to them cordially at the door, and, late as it was, returned at once to the kitchen and asked the old lady if she had a postcard. She gave him the one with the violets and the church, saying she did not know whether he would like it. He answered her that it was one of the nicest he had ever seen, and in a burst of gratefulness to her for being so sweet and kindly he told her he was going to write to his sister and ask her to come down to him. "If," he added, as an afterthought, "you can do with her?"

"Dear, yes," said the old lady. "It'll be nice company for you." He felt that there was a piece of unspoken criticism in this, and warmed to her more than ever; she gave him a tiny stump of indelible pencil, and he knelt down at the corner of the kitchen table and wrote the summons to Athene by the light of the fire.

He walked down the country road late next afternoon

to meet her, and she saw him approaching, without a hat, and distinguished the smile on his face while he was still several paces before her. At a distance the slow step, that height, and the carriage of the head suggested the celebrated person that she looked upon with unspoken pride, a feeling outside her inward sympathy and admiration, but when he came close up to her and took her suit-case he was so much the creature she had grown up with that she could think of nothing but wondering how he had managed by himself, and if the old lady had been kind to him. If she had had any serious doubts, they were resolved when she entered the cottage and saw the delicious meal spread out on the round table, where the lamp was already lit. They cleared it away themselves afterwards, to give as little trouble as possible.

"That'll do," said Roger, completing the pile of crockery on the tray by the door. Athene surveyed the little table.

"It'll be thought sweet of you to have done anything at all," she said, "and very slatternly of me to have left so many crumbs about." Roger was looking about for a tin of toffee he had secreted somewhere, and she glanced at a spread-out heap of papers.

"Do you get on well?" she said. A phrase came under her eyes that struck her own mind and aroused delightful echoes; she need not have asked the question. He murmured, "I think—I think I shan't take any wrong turnings now—where—oh, here it is." He produced the tin and gave her a piece of toffee.

"This is exactly the stuff that used to be given to us when we were young," he announced.

"Was toffee given to me when I was young?" said Athene plaintively, stripping off the waxy paper.

“Certainly,” he replied firmly. “Most of it was given to you, if I remember rightly.” She laughed, and distended her cheek with the toffee, leaning over the fireplace with her elbow on the mantelpiece among the china cats and dogs and the little baskets encrusted with roses and forget-me-nots. Roger was stripping the paper off several pieces of toffee and putting the shiny bare squares on a piece of note-paper. It pleased him to have the exertion over and done with for the evening. The room and the valley, which had hitherto been an adventure of infinite charm and consolation, had now become, by the mere presence of Athene, dearer and less noticeable. He had been here for ages—it was all a part of himself. “This is a very good place for work, I find,” he said, blinking across the lamplight. “I hope you can stay a long time with me.”

“Oh, my dear,” she said in distress, “I really don’t think I can stay beyond the end of the week. I’ve promised to do some jobs for Alice Corder for one thing—and——”

“Thoughtless creature,” he said severely.

“Would you like Lydia to come down?” she asked suddenly. He got up and looked out of the panes, behind which the country was hardly discernible, though the tree-tops bending all one way under a stiff evening breeze showed how loud and stirring the murmuring and flowing sounds would be if he opened the window to them.

“No, no,” he said. “Perhaps I’ll have had enough myself by the time you go.”

The thought of Lydia was too closely connected with that of someone else. It was on that evening when Lydia had deserted him that he had reached out and taken Fanny. He thought of her with tender affection always,



and an almost romantic admiration. He had never known how much she would return his feelings, but the only thing to do now was not to see her any more—at least for a long time, until she was recovered ; some young man would eventually put him out of her mind. The whole affair, now that he thought of it calmly, was distasteful to him, but he preserved her image in his mind untouched by the circumstances with which it had been surrounded. This was partly facilitated by his not seeing her again, and yet a further reason for this was that he could not bring himself at present to confide the affair to Athene ; they seldom alluded to their personal love-affairs in their conversation, for their intimacy was such that it caused them an embarrassment like that of incest ; she would never trespass on his reserve, and he had no hesitation in merely not referring to it ; but if he were to be in continual contact with the girl, to maintain an appearance of casual acquaintance before Athene—in other words, to deceive her, would be impossible. But did she know already ? He glanced at her sitting on the other side of the table, her head bent over a novel, of which she carefully turned the pages now and again. If he were to ask her suddenly when she had last seen Fanny, how she looked, what she had been doing, she would raise her head, answer simply and composedly, tell him what he wanted to know, and go on reading again. It would be so easy ; but she was so penetrating, though so silent, that if he did not want to turn her thoughts in a certain direction he hardly dared to think the thing himself, lest she should feel it in his mind, far less put her a leading question on the subject. He had previously murmured something about Fanny's existence, which was indeed responsible for Miss

Simon's having paid any attention to her ; and this in itself must have struck her secretly, for he usually avoided strange people rather than bringing them forward. And if he were to emphasise his interest by further questions—— He lowered his eyes hastily, lest she should feel them upon her and look up. In any case, he thought, one feels in these cases so much more, in all probability, than the person concerned. Fanny was probably restored already. He wondered, as he opened his tobacco-pouch, what she was doing.

\* \* \*

On the morning after the party, Fanny had wakened up quite suddenly and realised herself to be in an anguish so acute that her mind at once controlled itself in an effort to bear it as it would automatically have taken a grip upon itself in a crisis of physical pain. She got up, and prepared to go to the office with a faint sensation of feeling unreal and light ; the pain which she had till now dissembled partially in substituting the figure she could see for the one she could not, in self-deception and groundless hope, now uncovered itself as something hot and shining that seemed to brim her mind ; she ate her food with an effort like that of chewing wood, but as the time went on she was sometimes very thirsty, and would prepare to take a long drink, and then find that she did not want it after all. When she was engaged at her typewriter, the matter in hand formed a veil across her mind, and she worked feverishly, with an effort of brilliant concentration to keep it there. The excitement of this process lasted for the few days when the matter was at its worst, when she would sometimes, coming home from work, lean against a wall or take hold of a tree without knowing what she was doing ;

when, on looking in the glass, she seemed to have lost herself altogether and not quite to realise who was looking at the face, whether she herself was looking at a face which did not belong to her, or whether the face was herself and the wondering, questioning personality were something in space, unrelated to her. She took now to taking some tablets which she had once been given for sleeplessness and had had by her unfinished ; two taken when she came in made it possible for her, coming out of the office at half-past five, to be asleep by half-past six or so, and, with a continuous stream of work during the greater part of the day, and the long periods of unconsciousness, she did reasonably well. After five days or so her energy seemed to drop ; and as suddenly she stopped, of her own accord, taking the drug ; she seemed instinctively to turn away from it. She became more and more neglectful of her work, and in the evenings she would creep home and read crime stories, or *The Conquest of Mexico*, and sometimes *The Wealth of Nations* ; the last she was given by Emma, who used often to be in her room when she arrived, making coffee, and who would sit a long time with her brushing her hair, or reading aloud to her out of one or other of these works. The blankness in her mind was certainly accompanied by the fact that the pain was less ; sometimes, indeed, it seemed not to be there at all ; and then she would move about very carefully, as a person avoids a sharp turn of the head for fear of bringing on a headache. A nice girl worked in her part of the office, who had recently become engaged to a nice though rather restricted young man ; Rosemary was very pretty, with dark copper-red hair, which in days past Fanny had tried to persuade her to grow a little long, and wear behind her ears. But Rosemary said no,

neither she nor George really cared for anything at all what she called *outré* ; so her lovely hair remained parted on the side, shaved away up to the middle of the back of her head, harshly crimped and dulled with cheap waving. Even so, Fanny felt afterwards, she was right. The other coiffure would have foisted upon her an air—a suggestion which it was not hers to sustain. She was protected by a singular completeness which gave her an air at once childish and reassuring. She had two mascots on her desk—a celluloid baby in a little German painted cradle and a green velvet cat. She gave the cat to Fanny, who had none ; they both agreed it should be called Stevens, and Fanny became quite fond of it.

The corner of the room, with Stevens, had become, fragile and exposed though it was, a sanctuary. Fanny did less and less work in it. Rosemary never did a great deal, and was sometimes reprimanded, which made her crushed and defiant, like a schoolgirl. She was surprised to see Fanny becoming as idle as herself.

“ What’s the matter ? ” she said, but as she was such a dear that did not matter at all. They had the room to themselves, and, because girls frequently say things to each other that they would not say to other people, even to those whom they like and know better, Fanny said :

“ I wish I were dead.”

“ Oh, well,” said Rosemary, “ I shouldn’t worry. I know I used to have all sorts of neurotic ideas about myself before I was engaged.” She glanced complacently at the modest ruby on her third finger. She pulled out of a drawer a glossy papered fashion-book and began to peep inside it.

“ There’s a design here for a collar,” she said. “ I hope to goodness we don’t get kept to-day. I want to

go home early and put a new one on my coat. I want to wear it to-morrow ; George's uncle, who is an awfully nice man and manages the gasworks, is going to take us out in his car. He really is an awfully nice man ; he said such nice things to me."

" I daresay he did," said Fanny, " I don't wonder." She thought, " You must seem like a fairy present given to that family."

" Well, it's very nice of you to say so," continued Rosemary, " but if I can't get that coat done in time I shall have absolutely nothing to wear."

" Why don't you wear your new coat and skirt ? " asked Fanny.

" They saw me in that last time," said Rosemary. " I don't like to go in the same thing twice running." It seemed to Fanny that this attention to costume was quite out of place, for Rosemary's clothes were quite negligible ; she was one of those who aimed at smartness and did not quite achieve it, and, even had she done so, Fanny was sure no George, and certainly no uncle from the gasworks, would notice clothes that had Rosemary's face on top of them. She could not, however, very well suggest this, as Rosemary, who seemed to have very little perception of where her charm actually lay, was earnest and complacent in her views of her own dress. Fanny sat with her head in her hands watching her with a white face while she continued to turn over the fashion-book.

" I wish we could go back to crinolines or panniers or something," said Rosemary ; her own skirt was up to the knees, and showed a pair of spindly legs that were made more noticeable by her pretty, rather full bosom.

" Yes," said Fanny, " I think a long skirt is more graceful."

“ So do I,” said Rosemary, “ but I have to wear short skirts because they are fashionable.”

Something in what she said, behind the words themselves, acted unexpectedly on Fanny ; a moment before she had been quite composedly listening to Rosemary’s remarks with acquiescence ; now, in a sentence, the whole of the fatuity and horror of her existence was conjured up before her. She put her head down on her hands.

“ My dear,” exclaimed Rosemary, in distress, “ I didn’t mean you weren’t fashionable ; you look very well dressed. Everybody says so.” But it was too late to stop. She broke into a helpless flood of weeping such as she had never known before. Rosemary was alarmed but highly practical.

“ Go home, my dear,” she said firmly. “ I’ll explain if anyone asks why you’re not here. Do you want a taxi ? I expect the walk would do you good really, though.” Fanny checked the tears, finding it easier to do this because of a feeling that they would come again later. Ever since she began this dreadful loving she had been in the grasp of forces too strong for her ; as she walked home she knew that the cloud over her mind was going to burst afresh at any moment, with the certainty of the person who waits to be fetched for an operation. She moved about uncertainly when she got in ; it seemed too silly to sit down and invite tears ; she pulled open a drawer. What confusion ! Stockings, gloves, handkerchiefs ; she had allowed everything to take its own way for so long. Mechanically she began to straighten the disorder, to roll up the stockings and put them into another drawer, to refold the handkerchiefs ; under the handkerchief-case she came upon the two postcards which were all she had. The sight of the



pointed, angular writing, reminding her that once she had actually received this treasure casually through the post, had seen it lying on the table in the hall below, came upon her so suddenly that she was sobbing while her hands still rested in the drawer. At last she was face to face with it ; the protections she had put between it and herself for the past fortnight or so were swept away. She gave herself up to it entirely.

The next morning, and for some time afterwards, her chief concern was with the soreness and stiffness of her eyes. She had almost ceased to think about anything, and had become completely silent ; this was not from any intense preoccupation with grief, but from numbness and general disinclination to exert herself. She was quite pleased to go about with people as long as they did the talking ; she even dined with Edwin Stagg, and smiled at his remarks without any difficulty. So when Ivan rang her up and said, " Why don't you come up on Sunday morning and go for a walk on the heath ? " she said, " Yes, I'd like to."

When she arrived at Ivan's house on the Sunday, a cold, crystalline morning in May, she found the party assembled downstairs drinking chocolate in preparation. Ivan, in a slenderly fitting suit, with a large plaid scarf round his shoulders, turned round as she came in.

" Look here, Fanny," he said. One of the girls, a beautiful mannequin, had brought him a little pot of delicate pink flowers, growing on long hair-like stalks.

" I call that scrumptious," said Ivan, admiring it on the mantelpiece. Anthony Simon, who was lying on the sofa in a dangerously bad temper, checked the ill-natured remarks he had been making at the expense of a little fat girl who had become engaged to one of his friends. Anthony detested her fat prettiness, her

polished, pointed, dirty finger-nails, and what he considered her insufferable stupidity. Catherine was very pleased with herself, however, and charmed her young man by her innocent and merry voluptuousness ; but Anthony saw it all in a very different light from the pleased swain, and lay on the sofa wrapped in what had been Ivan's father's travelling-rug and made unpleasant remarks at frequent intervals. The group were accustomed to abusing each other with light-hearted vehemence, and Catherine in particular was used to it ; she exasperated so many people. But Anthony came of a family who knew how to lacerate, and had inherited a rather cruder form of their terrible weapon without the tact and mildness of behaviour that accompanied it in them. The room had begun to feel distinctly uneasy, and even Catherine had grown very red above her rouge. Ivan created a distraction by picking one of the flowers and putting it into his buttonhole, and calling upon everyone to admire the effect.

"Your scarf will cover it, Ivan," said the beauty.

"Well, I'll have to leave the scarf off, that's all, Susan."

"You won't want it, Ivan ; it's as warm as anything."

"It's darned cold on the heath. Don't know what we want to go up there for at all."

"Well, you'd better stay at home and keep warm in the rug."

"You'd better keep it on, Ivan. It makes you look like someone out of a novel."

Ivan was standing in the middle of the room with a bright, perplexed look, like a squirrel.

"Well, Fanny," he said, turning to her, "you're a girl of ideas. Shall I wear it or shan't I ?"

The world of ordinary happenings had so fallen away from Fanny's consciousness that she now listened with a kind of wonder when people told her things about themselves, presupposing that they could be of any interest, with those sentences such as "You know my way," or "Of course, that sort of thing simply amuses me." And now, when she had to give an opinion, in the capacity of one noted for ideas, as to whether Ivan should or should not take a scarf on a morning walk, her mind was a complete blank. The room was momentarily silent, as everyone had thrown a light dart at the target, and was now waiting for her to send one right in the bull's-eye. She was conscious of the pause, and strove wildly to think of something suitable ; it was too stupid, but she could not connect her mind with the matter ; for a second she gazed horrorstruck at the faces, then she said with a weak, silly smile :  
"You might want it, perhaps."

The talk instantly broke out again and flowed across the pause ; she took refuge under their kindly ignoring of her. Ivan said :

"Well, come on, you creatures," and they went off.

Anthony said to himself, "I thought there was something in that girl ; she's just a silly like the rest of them." There was nothing about her now to distinguish her from everybody else ; he couldn't remember what there had been before, but he was sure there had been something. His bad temper increased, and he walked ahead of the party all up Heath Street. They found the bright ponds covered with fluttering white sails and surrounded by the Sunday morning crowd, and speedily lost themselves among the green and earthy-coloured hills and valleys ; the heath was at its best, for all around them were the signs of gaiety, in

the distant shouts and the glimpses of painted wood stalls among the trees, and yet they had the grass to themselves. They walked on in great spirits until a rise of some sharpness brought them to the top of one of the sudden precipitous descents which were now plastered with slippery mud, for the rains had been heavy, and the sun, though bright, was not powerful enough to dry the ground. The girls looked at their shoes in dismay ; but, the lively Catherine being at once caught up by her young man, the suggestion became general that the girls should be carried down. Anthony, looking round sullenly—for he was not anxious to carry anybody—suddenly realised that Fanny was the lightest person present, and offered his assistance. The beautiful Susan Heywood preferred clinging to Ivan's arm and making a very slow, very delicate progress down the slope ; and they set off.

Now that he was so close to her, and looking down at her face, he found himself rediscovering the charm he had seen on the other occasion. It was not arresting as it had been then, but seemed hidden away under a rather lifeless exterior which made it the more subtle and alluring when he had penetrated to it ; something had driven it right inside her, but when one came close to her one could see it obscurely. When she lifted her eyelids and looked up at him with a slow stare, he felt as if he had dived down through the waters, and come upon something lying in the floor of a pool. He put her down on the grass, and they were called to by the others to decide on the route. Fanny felt a little conscious, and gave her opinion on the path with more decision than she had shown for weeks ; they went along to one she suggested, and she walked on the other side of Ivan, occasionally adding a word to the

discussion. She did not want to be observed ; she was anxious all at once to look as much as possible like other people.

When they had lunched at a public house on the far side of the heath, and had been driven home in the gig belonging to the establishment, Fanny was preparing to leave Ivan's doorstep when Anthony came up to her and said, " Can I come and see you some time ? Shall I come to tea ? "

" I don't get out till five, except on Saturday," she said.

" Well, Saturday, then."

She had put aside her ordinary politeness just as she no longer now powdered her face or wore any of her necklaces.

" Yes, come if you would like to," she said. Anthony seemed satisfied, and she walked away.

\* \*

Miss Corder was disturbed ; she had been used to consider Fanny Arne as one of her most reliable employees. She had been neat, conscientious, and agreeable ; and, though not a particularly rapid worker, a thoroughly efficient one. As Miss Corder now surveyed the four typewritten letters which contained a high percentage of spelling mistakes, and two errors which turned the paragraphs in which they occurred into nonsense, she was looking particularly severe. Not that her chief concern was in the incompetence of the work ; she had no idea of running a business for the advantage of young women in general and of being indifferent to the welfare of those she was connected with in particular. But, knowing as little as she did about the actual concerns of the girls who worked for her,

although she was familiar with their circumstances, it made it, she felt, so very difficult to put her finger on the spot. An elderly woman, she thought, can so easily abuse her influence, and turn sympathy into interference, and she was in general averse from encouraging the all-too-marked tendencies of young ladies to talk about themselves, both for their own sakes and her own. She was afraid that something was really wrong with Miss Arne, however ; she would have offered her a holiday when her work first began to show signs of deterioration, except that to her the girl appeared wretched rather than actually ill, and she thought, therefore, that work might be of more use to her than leisure ; she was, in any case, free to apply for a holiday if she wanted one. Miss Corder decided, however, that she must do something.

There was in her manner something so composed and formidable that most of the young ladies felt a curious dissolving sensation about their knees when they had to go and speak to her ; and even Fanny, who had been insensible to almost every influence for so long, felt a slight vibration of the nerves as she came into the room at Miss Corder's request the next morning.

Miss Corder, preserving a mild and amiable expression about the lips, darted a penetrating glance at Fanny, and said :

" I believe you haven't been very well lately, Miss Arne."

" Oh, yes, I have, thank you," said Fanny ; the rather high and strained note of her voice did not escape Miss Corder, who said briskly :

" Do you feel a week or so away would freshen you up a little ? "

A horror of being forced away from the office and



left to the endless precipices and quicksands of her own mind made Fanny say hastily and with real urgency :

“ Oh, no, thank you, not at all.”

“ Well, then,” said Miss Corder, with a severity she did not altogether feel. “ If you are not ill, and not tired, Miss Arne, I must really ask for some explanation of the way your work has deteriorated in the last fortnight. I have complaints about your slowness from Miss Knox, and what you do is really almost useless. Look at this letter ; do you expect me to sign my name to that ? And this one is almost as bad ; they’ll all have to be re-done. That means two posts will have been missed. It really is shocking. Have you any reasonable explanation ? ”

Fanny was speechless ; she knew her work had been very bad, but had, in her stupidity, never faced the possibility of having to give an explanation to Miss Corder of all people. Her instinct of self-preservation even had reached its lowest, and, instead of answering in some such phrase as, “ My affairs have been rather distracting,” or “ I have had a good deal to worry me,” she could think of nothing but that she was being asked to tell the story which, although she perpetually dwelt on fragments of it, she dared not disinter even to her own mind.

“ I cannot believe it is merely slackness,” continued Miss Corder’s voice ; “ I have too high an opinion of you.” She kept her penetrating stare full on the face before her, ready at a second’s notice to lower her eyelids. But she had no need to, for the eyes were anywhere—all round the room—rather than on her face. “ She is not paying the least attention,” thought Miss Corder. “ She is only trying to get away.” She added, using the remark as a surgeon uses an instrument,

“ Well, whatever the reason, I feel sure you will see that this state of things cannot go on. It would be tiresome in a voluntary worker, but when one is paid . . . ” Her tones were perfectly gentle and persuasive, and, as she saw the quiver and the brilliant blush, she felt the satisfaction of one who has accomplished a delicate and unerring stroke.

“ That has done it,” she thought. She listened to the stream of words, aroused and ardent.

She had known it was disgraceful, dishonest ; she had nothing to say, but she would do better ; she would, indeed, if Miss Corder gave her another trial, unless Miss Corder thought she had better go at once. She would quite understand, if . . .

She felt an acute shame that smarted in her mind like the not unpleasant application of a disinfectant ; she was roused now, in spite of her hurry of protestation, to something of her old precision of speech, and her face was lighted with its former clearness.

Miss Corder was highly satisfied ; she had difficulty in keeping out of her voice the tones which would have betrayed how mere a mask her words had been as she assured Miss Arne that she did not want to get rid of her at all, and had never thought of it, and that if she would only get back to her own standard she would ask nothing better. The interview closed abruptly : Fanny, walking into the sunny outer office, sat down and struggled with a pile of work. By the end of the morning she even felt a slight steadying of mind.

In the next few days she was to experience a strange comfort in various ways ; in going to and fro in the streets it was she hardly realised how great a relief to know that there was no one whose appearance could cause her the least emotion ; formerly, all her life,

she had been sensitive about her appearance if she thought it conspicuous. Now she walked about as she pleased, in any variety of costume. The posts that had caused her such an anguish of fear and hope and misery she now took a curious feeling of consolation in disregarding, walking upstairs without so much as glancing at the letter-table. A kind of repose settled on her ; she said to herself, " How can anybody know at twenty ? " but in her inmost heart she knew that her happiness was gone utterly, yet in the surface of her mind she was able to feel almost with pleasure the re-awakening faculties. She began to have flowers in her room again ; not the large bouquets she had been used to arrange, but, as if fearful of arousing too keen a sensation in herself, little bunches of daisies, a few narcissi in a glass, and a handful of white tulips. She herself thought she was rather happy ; though she was often vaguely puzzled as to why people could think that their own affairs were really so interesting to her as to warrant their saying, " You know the way I have," " You know that's exactly what I can't stand," or, with Ivan Archer, long, long recitals . . . " He said, ' Well, good Lord, you *are* a funny chap ' ; he seemed quite impressed by it—just a casual remark I happened to make. I didn't think there was anything in it." She listened, but always with that slight surprise that they should think these things mattered to her, had any place in her consciousness, that she had observed their way, or cared what it was exactly that they couldn't stand, or who had been impressed by them.

But she was beginning to struggle against this complete indifference to other people's emotions. For in these silent days she was beginning to regard the wreck that her anguish and desolation had made of a once

sound and lively mind with something of self-reproach and shame. Not that she felt she had any duty to herself ; but when she turned her thoughts towards him, as she now dared consciously to do, she could find nothing in her contemplation of him but the purest of admiring love ; her reason fully sanctioned her passion, and this sense made a small foundation of repose in the centre of her torment that she hoped and prayed in time would bear her up entirely. Already she could take the view that the parts of her experience that were wrong and terrible—her suffering and deterioration—were the outcome of weakness in herself, and were nothing really to do with the love itself ; and it seemed, when he was, for her, with all his faults, the symbol of virtue and enlightenment, wicked and shameful in her to associate with him her own demoralisation, and a heart that was hardened and degraded by misery. The sight of the girls who were, for instance, infatuated with Ivan Archer, how they quarrelled and maligned each other, and became shrill and ludicrous, filled her with dismay and pity, and she received a faint but exquisite consolation from the thought that her own behaviour, if in any degree rational and virtuous, was a result of Roger's influence stealing through her. More and more she came to dissociate her love from her misery ; she was now doing consciously what she had always done unknown to herself ; for she realised that in all the times when she had wished herself dead she had never wished that the thing had not happened at all.

Now she would stop deliberately, trying to discern the feelings of other people. She listened now intently to Rosemary's anecdotes, when she did not feel it her duty to repress conversation in the interests of her work.

Often, on her way to and from the office, she would stoop down to look into the faces of the dirty little children on the pavement. And when Anthony Simon came to see her, and stayed hours lounging in her room in his curious, distracted, and gloomy manner, she was infinitely patient and agreeable with him. She would not allow herself to consider what her own attitude to him was ; her composure was not yet firm enough to bear imagining anyone whose appearance bore so many suggestive resemblances in any sort of relationship with herself, but he seemed unhappy and wrought up, and not to know what to do with himself, and it was terrible, terrible that anyone should be unhappy ! So she did all she could for him in letting him lie there, making him afternoon tea on a Saturday or Sunday, which he loved having, and talking gently to him while she darned her stockings.

Anthony, who knew nothing of her circumstances, was fascinated by that remote appearance ; it was secure and reposeful, for it meant he could look at her without her noticing it, and stay about as long as he liked without her being incommoded by him. He was fascinated, too, by the propriety of this little place. Everything was clean and radiant and warm. People talked about artistic squalor, he thought, as if it were something romantic ; this was the romantic thing, this clear, soft brightness, this supernatural purity, like the petals of flowers ; it was as far removed from ordinary housewifely orderliness as it was from his own confusion. He could not analyse it ; he only delighted in it. And his mind, fatigued with his own sordid *milieu* and wounded at being shut out of the clean and comfortable surroundings of his family, derived great satisfaction from thinking that here at least was something

quite as fine in its own way as anything his relations could boast, and here he was quite welcome.

It was extraordinarily soothing, like a day in the country ; but he did not think about her as a person very clearly until one day when he returned to his rooms with a portfolio of drawings he had been showing her. As he turned back the black cardboard leaves to put one of the drawings up on the wall again, he found her handkerchief lying under the flap. He held it in the palm of his hand, and the air seemed to stir it ; it was crushed up, and, as he thought that every one of those creases had been made by her hand, something so living seemed to emanate from the folds that as they stirred slightly under his breath it seemed a part of her, she herself with him. He stood gazing at it for a long time, while the light changed on the other side of the square ; he feared to alter one of the crumples ; if he did that he would lose something.

\* \* \*

Helena said, " I want you to come out next Friday evening and eat bread and cheese and drink beer with some friends of mine at Golders Green " ; for Helena's friends were apt to be those who do not merely eat this fare when it comes in their way, but rather set themselves out to indulge in it, as something that gave them a *cachet*.

Fanny would have liked the drive in Helena's car out to Hampstead in the calm and beautiful evening, but, though she thought Helena's friends very cheerful and good-natured, she felt that at present she would prefer to spend the evening reading or in some household pursuit. Their interests were all in Socialist politics and birth control, and those little shops where you got



woodcuts, and she could not talk with intelligence on any of these subjects. They also abused the society to which Roger belonged, partly because they did not appreciate it, partly, perhaps, because they were excluded from it, and they thought Fanny, who did not go bicycling tours with them, was a rather useless and pining little creature, a product of Conservatism and the capitalist system ; though, had they stopped to consider it, her little muslin dresses cost about a quarter of the amount the ladies themselves paid for their heavy, hand-woven linens. So, though they were kind to her and talked to her, she was apt to become rather submerged in the conversation—not that she minded this as a rule, but at present she shrunk from so alien an atmosphere.

Helena had discarded her latest young man and was at present a very decided advocate for a life free from emotional entanglements. When Fanny refused the invitation she therefore began :

“ You know, Fanny, you’re absolutely ruining yourself like this ; people can’t live entirely shut up in themselves. However much in love you are, my dear, you’ll have to come out and mix with other human things ; you’ll shrivel up altogether if you go on like this.”

When Fanny thought of the efforts she was already making to mix herself with human beings, she felt this accusation deeply ; but she knew from experience that when Helena was possessed of an idea she had to develop it, regardless of its application to the person to whom she might be talking.

“ After all, we all fall in love,” continued Helena, “ but it’s no good sitting down under it. You’ve simply got to make the effort, however much it costs you.”

"Oh, Helena," cried Fanny, "if you knew what efforts I am making!"

"Well, then," said Helena, "why not come to-night?"

How could she explain, thought Fanny, that to do that would be a gigantic exertion; too rough and sudden for her small and cautious steps towards recovery?

"They are perfectly simple people," continued Helena. "It's simply a dislike for company of any sort that makes you refuse."

(Oh, how can I explain how hard and heavy these people are to me?)

"It's different for you," she said aloud. "They're all your friends; they don't seem difficult to you. They are to me, very. But I will come another time, Helena; I will really. Only not to-night."

"Well," said Helena, "I'm disappointed. I feel sure it would do you good." She got up to go.

"Helena," cried Fanny, "don't be cross with me."

"Of course I'm not cross, you little idiot."

"You see," continued Fanny, hanging on her arm, "it isn't just that I don't like your friends; I do. Only just at present it's difficult to meet anyone, so it's no good my going among people—people, I mean, who are really not my sort at all; it's too much—and I couldn't be any good to them either at present. I'd simply be sitting among them expecting a cure, and looking a perfect lunatic, not able to say anything."

Helena looked at her, smiling.

"Well, good night," she said. "Take care of yourself, and let me know when you mean to come out of your snail shell." She went off, and Fanny, taking off her dress and wrapping herself up in a quilted silk

dressing-gown, preparatory to settling down to an evening's reading, was conscious of a good deal of irritation and some little alarm.

When she remembered with how much effort she had nurtured her little impulse towards being social and friendly with people, how earnestly she was setting herself all the time to overcome this state of mind that cried out continually: "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable!" to every aspect of existence except the one closed to her for ever, she thought Helena had been exasperating and unfair. And what a remedy! To spend two hours sitting among those people! Talking to busmen or road-menders, if you like, but to have to listen to the Hampstead *intelligentsia*. Well, it was no use being angry. She pushed her hair behind her ears, kicked off her shoes, and curled up on the sofa. But the fact that, despite all her exertions and her determination, Helena had still refused to believe that she was anything but a determined recluse alarmed her. The next day, therefore, a Saturday, she got up and occupied herself in the accumulation of small affairs that are apt to get left till Saturday morning when a person is occupied all the week, with a conscientiousness and thoroughness that gave her in itself some sort of exhilaration. If at the back of her mind there was the fear of what Roger would have thought of a person so feeble and morose, of how he would have turned away, with that bodily and mental gesture that she knew so well, from anything so unlovely as in Helena's eyes she appeared to be, she did not examine it. But it came to her that, though she could no more be enlightened herself by that limpid and discerning vision of what was beautiful, the beautiful thing still remained, and, if one were to strive for one's

own apprehension of it, it would be a process bringing one in the end nearer to his outlook than a complete dependence on him, which could only result, perhaps, in a devitalised mentality.

These confident ideas occupied her till lunch, and she sat down feeling feverish and elated.

She had realised that among other things she had not paid the least attention to what she ate for weeks. She now collected an agreeable meal—brown bread and a cream cheese and pomegranates. As she ate these delicious things she felt a wild sensation of eagerness to vindicate herself by tasting all the pleasures she had cast off. She wondered what to do ; the whole range of things that the unfettered person can do in London of an afternoon, from walking in the park to having the hair cut in Wigmore Street, passed before her mind. The morning newspaper, which she had looked at for the first time in several weeks instead of putting it on to the unread pile, advertised one of those films of German production that ravish the senses by their arrangement of soft lights resting like bloom on groups of cut-glass, rose-petals, lace, and finger-nails. She felt suddenly that to be shut up in a vast, velvet-lined cinema, where one is so private and where one's sensations seem to be hidden even from the self that belongs to the daylight, would be a very good form of amusement and relief.

It was now five minutes to two ; how beautiful her clock was, with its circle of gold figures on a satin square ! Its small, glinting beauty slid into her mind, and reproached her obliviousness with a warm pain. She went into her bedroom and fished out a dress that, since it was made, she had never had spirits to wear ; she put it on, and picked up one of her necklaces that

had once been a favourite—alternating beads of crystal and silver.

As she walked up Regent Street, the shop-fronts, the airy blue sky, and the road that ran like a sword-blade under the crawling buses, seemed in her present state of mind perfect, in that they expressed the importance of what they represented and their own utter unreality. Her steps on the pavement made a ringing noise, and a curious rhythm was haunting her ear to which she could attach no words. Her mind groped among half-forgotten words and phrases as among strewn shell and spars and ore half hidden by sand. And suddenly, of themselves, the words sprang across her brain, flying and singing like a bird made of stars :—

*“ I am all fire and air ! ”*

She reached the curved front of the cinema, and peered through the glass and mahogany swing doors. The marble paved hall with its palm-trees was bright and cheerful, but the air did not feel so good as in the street outside ; and there was something rather ominous in the silent figures in brown uniforms who mounted guard over the two dark caves that led to the auditorium. Each cavern was faintly illuminated by an electric bulb, and the dark-green steps looked as if they were carpeted with moss.

She bought a seat in the circle. Climbing the stairs and pushing through the plush-mantled door at the top, she paused a moment.

It was splendid !

In front of her, the curve of the circle swung out across the dark void that was lit along the walls with lamps like little bouquets of moonstones. It was like being aboard a galley ; while, down below, the movements of the orchestra settling itself and the rippling

lines of people passing into their seats gave the sense of something restless, wave-like, beneath that fixed rail.

The dark-haired young lady who stood with her coat and hat in her arms, looking out over the auditorium with such silent interest, attracted the notice of two people who sat side by side in the centre of a row. Her complete lack of self-consciousness and her absorption in the scene held their attention, and they watched her with pleasure as she felt her way forwards through the breathing gloom, one hand on the row of velvet chair-backs and with her necklace darting out stray sparks.

Quite unknowing, still imagining that the scene was one of idle amusement, utterly transient pleasures, a large toy box into which she had walked, she stumbled on a few paces, selected her seat, turned round, and found that she had sat down immediately in front of Roger and Athene.

It was some moments before she realised that the curious design far away in the air was the gilded framework of the screen. In those moments the whole tremulous fabric on which she had raised herself had shivered beneath her and hurled her down into a darkness that covered all her senses. Then with astonishing quickness her self-possession returned. The music burst out with a metallic crash and resolved itself into a low, brisk, running tune.

What has happened to me? she thought. What has happened? She was breathless but calm, and in the first moment could not tell whether she were unhurt or bleeding to death. She stared ahead of her, and the heads, and the pictures already flickering on the screen, came into clear and clearer focus as a bather sees the shore when he clears an unsuspected film of water from his eyes.



If only it were an hour later, she thought, feeling scarcely able to bear the tumult that was rising inside her. She was conscious also of a burning curiosity, a desire to turn round and look at them, to stare. In a few moments she took the slip of looking-glass out of her bag and, wrapping it in her handkerchief, held it up to her eye. All she could see, however, was the side of her own nose, and that in a very dispiriting condition.

But why did I never imagine this? she thought. With Roger's attitude being such as it was, and with not having seen either of them for so long, she had come to think that as she was separated from them in spirit she would never be thrown in their company again. The strain of being in their presence was what she was at present absolutely unequal to meet. But, when the lights went up, to sit there in what could not pass for real obliviousness of them were impossibly *gauche* and self-conscious—the sort of attitude that was always fatal. She turned round slowly, therefore, as if to survey the house, and instantly caught the eye of Miss Simon, who leaned forward and asked if they were to admire the piece. Roger at once got up and murmured something about tea, thus avoiding any particular greeting. But Miss Simon, being nearer the gangway, said, "I'll go," and departed in search of a waitress. Fanny sat watching the empty screen, as if she were chiefly interested in the film, and the presence of anyone she knew was merely a hindrance and interruption. Miss Simon, returning with a tray for three, was secretly pleased by the resolute position of her little black head. It meant, anyway, that they weren't going to be incommoded by pushing and exuberant conversation, as was only too apt to be the case when their young

acquaintances had the opportunity of speaking to them. She sat down and balanced the tray on Roger's knee while she arranged the tea-things. Never very good at the detail of the work of entertaining, she handed Fanny a cup of the inky fluid without asking whether she took milk or sugar.

"I think we have been very rash," observed Roger, scanning the plate of highly coloured little cakes. "These seem specially warranted to kill tigers." This did not trouble Fanny, however, who crumbled one in her saucer without tasting it, convinced that she had never enjoyed any food so much. In the middle of the second half of the programme they got up and murmured good-bye with a glimpse of a smile. They were swallowed up in the gloom at once—dissolved. She sat rolling her gloves into a ball; nothing was altered as regards the real thing. But all this anguish, this deliberate plunge into icy darkness, this idea that life had henceforth to be lived in blankness, without a ray from his presence, what had it all sprung from? It had come round to a cup of tea and a little conversation in a cinema.

Never before had she received so strong a sense of how she could make him easier by her behaviour. When she had sat in front of him, facing the screen, while Miss Simon procured the tea, she had not even had to struggle against an inclination to talk to him; loving him so deeply, she had been conscious of no desire but to maintain a rather shy and amiable appearance, that of an admiring but casual acquaintance. She seemed to have become older in the interval of his absence; her adoration in that moment had settled deeper into her being and become infused with a peculiar tenderness. Though he did not want her,

though her aim must be to seem indifferent, she knew now that she could no more attempt to drive him out of her mind than she could actually have turned him into the street. The prospect that the relinquishing of her independent attitude entailed, the renewed burden of hopes and fears, harrowing, brief ecstasies and long stretches of anguished emptiness, was at the moment hidden from her. As she stared at the screen she was conscious only of the return of the warm, life-giving tide. She had seen him again. That was everything.

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Anthony was walking with Fanny towards her house, after they had been having supper in Charlotte Street. The moonlight sky was a tender and brilliant blue ; they both walked in silence, Anthony in considerable agitation, and Fanny because she was caught up in some mysterious quietude where her thoughts and feelings presented themselves as dimly as the silent forms where the streets were in shadow. She had gradually become aware that, though Anthony's habits were so different from her own, and his disposition perhaps the reverse of hers, yet she felt at home with him in a way she never felt with any others of the young men of her acquaintance. She took his arm without thinking, she said out loud the trivial things that came into her head, and she had begun to realise that the sight of his head lolling on the cushions of her sofa, or reflected in the looking-glass, or outlined against her filmy white window-curtains, gave her a sense of repose and completeness that was so deeply seated as to be hardly recognised. She was almost afraid of examining this sensation ; she felt instinctively that it would presently develop and reveal itself in its full

significance. In the meantime, as they passed through Brunswick Square the trees in the garden were like fountains and cascades, pallid green, iridescent, and black ; she was thinking of the tree-tops she had seen out of a hotel window in France, and experiencing that same trance-like sensation in the quietude.

Suddenly, not looking where she was going, she stepped unwarily off the pavement and twisted her foot over. She sat down on the curb and hoped desperately that it was not going to prevent her walking ; she tried to rise, but it was impossible. Anthony said he would find a taxi, and ran round the corner ; he came back with one, and, lifting Fanny out of the middle of the little knot of people who had come up to comfort her in his absence, put her into the cab and drove off to her door. He assisted her upstairs, and they then found that, though it did not look as if she had broken anything, the pain was becoming acute, and she would not be able to walk, even about the room, by herself. Anthony was perplexed, and Fanny too much distracted to think. She supposed she would be all right soon ; what she really wanted was to be helped on to her bed and left there.

“ I'll ask Henry to come round,” exclaimed Anthony joyfully as this solution of the difficulty occurred to him. He ran at once round to his uncle's house, and was shown into the morning-room, where Deborah was sitting in front of the fire with a book. The sight of her made Anthony rather nervous ; he knew she wouldn't approve of Henry's being dragged out at this hour, and she merely confirmed his apprehension when she rather coldly suggested that there were other doctors in the neighbourhood to whom his friend might perhaps apply. But to Henry, the sight of his young nephew

standing miserably on the hearth-rug, and turning a flushed and anxious-looking face towards him as he entered the room, was very endearing. He said at once that he would come round and see what he could do ; and as they set off down the street Anthony hugged his arm and started to tell him about Fanny's mishap, and what an elegant and charming girl she was, in a way that he found irresistible. Fanny was, besides being in considerable pain, rather disconcerted when Anthony introduced him into her bedroom ; but Henry's charming kindness united to his professional ease in the situation soon dispelled her constraint. To Anthony there was something highly agreeable in seeing her in the hands of somebody so nearly related to himself, and in the pride of watching Henry's competence and his usefulness to her. Henry, however, was taken up with the business in hand ; he told Anthony to boil some water while he gently removed her shoe and stocking and examined the ankle, which he said was merely sprained. He then asked for some flannel, and waited for it to be produced ; he was accustomed to things being produced when he asked for them.

"Would a towel be any use ?" asked Fanny weakly.

"None at all," he replied, looking about the room. The patient subsided, having no further suggestion to offer.

"Would my tie do ?" said Anthony. "It's very broad, and it's silk. . . ."

"Flannel !" exclaimed Henry. "I must have flannel."

"Girls don't *have* flannel," urged Anthony ; he began to laugh in spite of himself.

"A flannel scarf ?" persisted Henry. "Or a woollen stocking would do," he added hopefully.

“ I’m very sorry,” said Fanny, “ but I haven’t any of these things.” She felt as she said it that it denoted a flimsy and worthless character ; she imagined the Misses Simons’ ash-coloured woollen stockings neatly rolled up and lying by the dozen in their drawers, and their piles of soft white woollen undergarments. She felt as trivial as a paper doll, with her scraps of lawn and muslin and her silk and cotton stockings.

“ Well, let me have anything you’ve got,” said Henry resignedly ; he poured the water into a bowl, and Anthony at once stepped over to the chest of drawers ; he was highly excited. The scene with Fanny perfectly abandoned and quiescent, propped up on the bed without shoe and stocking, and the liberty he had to search among her things, was almost too interesting to last ; he felt that for one second a door behind which was some prospect he was intensely curious to examine was being opened, and that it would close again before he could just make sure of the things he most wanted to see. He pulled open a drawer full of little things, and wondered whether he would discover the usual packet of notes and mementoes, covered with the little raspberry-coloured marks of kisses ; but there seemed to be nothing of the kind—only all sorts of little personal odds and ends, which reassured him. He could not stay to examine the handkerchiefs and gloves, much as he would have liked to do so ; he pulled out a long silk scarf and asked if it would do. Henry accepted it, though without enthusiasm, and was soon applying a hot fomentation.

“ There,” he said when it was finished, “ I won’t presume to say don’t walk on it, but the more you keep it up the sooner it’ll be better.” He rose and began to put away the various articles he had disarranged.



Fanny was concerned by a single idea ; she felt she could not properly offer him a fee, but she devoutly hoped that Anthony would. It would be the merest graceful gesture ; it would be refused, and she herself completely at rest. She took advantage of Henry's back being turned to beckon to Anthony, who came and hung over her.

"How shall I ever thank your uncle?" she whispered. "You shouldn't have fetched him."

"That's all right," Anthony was beginning, but she interrupted :

"Shall I offer him the fee, or will he send me a bill?"

Anthony pressed her hand. "I'll see to that," he said.

"Thank you ever so much," she murmured. Their lips had hardly moved, their heads being so close together, so that Henry had no idea of what they had been talking about, and had purposely made no hurry.

"Well," he said, "I'll say good night." He smiled in that kindly and abstracted manner, and shook hands. She tried to say how very kind he had been, but she was so much moved that when he leant over her she gazed upon his unknown familiar face with the avidity and luxurious relief of a thirsty person taking a long drink of water. He did not like to remind her of the party where they had met before, doubting if she even recognised him, so he took his departure immediately. Anthony followed him out and thanked him earnestly, at the same time asking to be allowed to pay whatever was the usual thing for visits of this kind. Henry replied as uncles do, and hurried home to his armchair.

"Anthony might do worse than that," he thought.

He had taken a favourable idea of her on the night when he had discovered her weeping in her pale pink dress, and put her into a taxi. His second meeting had strengthened the first vague impression. Although on the only two occasions when he had seen her she had been in need of assistance herself, his idea of her was of someone who would be able to look after Anthony. The boy certainly needed it.

Anthony had been so much pleased with the evening's work (he could not even sincerely regret the mishap to Fanny, once the first shock of it was over) that he went home quite elated ; he seemed to have advanced so much into Fanny's private life that he felt himself belonging to the sphere of comfort and tranquillity and freshness. He forgot his own surroundings ; when he opened the door of his living-room it came upon him with a shock of remembrance ; the motionless scene, in which the piled and scattered objects seemed petrified into a disorder as immovable as the ruins on a volcano's side. He moved a string of fairy lights, which he had bought for a party that had afterwards been abandoned, from a chair, and sat down. For one moment he had the idea of starting vigorously to arrange his belongings ; of clearing out the dusty lengths of Bosnian cotton, bought in the Caledonian market (only one never knew when they'd come in useful) ; of cleaning all the paint-brushes and putting them away (but it would be so arduous, days and days of labour) ; of ordering the servant to look out all his clothes and get them cleaned and mended. But she had attempted to do that once on her own initiative, and no one would believe the confusion and desolation of not being able to get hold of any familiar garments. He thought perhaps he would ring up Ivan

Archer and suggest their going to Brighton for the week-end. Ivan was a good sort of person to go away with. He dragged into his bedroom, and began to pull off his coat. This going about with girls was hopeless ; he hadn't done any work for weeks. He knew that if he were to work, no matter what the result, he would be moving out of that deadly morass up towards the region he felt he was born to, and for which he suffered such homesickness. This condition of things enveloped him like a miasma ; he suffered the continual jarring of irritation and inertia. On the mantelpiece there were, among bills, litter, and tobacco, several photographs of beautiful young women, signed " En souvenir," or " With best wishes for all time " ; a bunch of peacock's feathers, two or three glass bracelets, an elaborately chased and rusty hookah in a crumbling morocco shrine lined with velvet, several birds' eggs, and a lump of cornelian. All these things were beautiful and interesting, and had been collected by a singularly discerning eye ; they were to have achieved some definite purpose ; but they lay about, under their dimming bloom of dust, and their effect was endless ruin. He started to take off his clothes, and before getting into bed his eye was caught by the spot of light in a large glass globe containing two goldfish—a favourite toy of his. He walked over to it, and noticed that the rusty gold shapes were floating motionless. They were dead. He had not changed the water for weeks. He stood staring at them ; the thought that came into his mind was that Fanny wouldn't have let the goldfish die.

He walked out uneasily into the living-room once more ; the lights were out, but the windows were large squares of pallid sky. He stood listening, but there was not a sound in the whole house. Fanny, Henry, Deborah

had all vanished into thin air ; nothing remained but this dark, lumbered room. He could bear it no longer, and for the first time in eighteen months he went downstairs to see his father.

James, aroused from sleep, sat up in bed, and reached for his pince-nez, which he put on, and gazed through them in stupefaction. Anthony stood shivering in the doorway, revealed by the electric light which he had switched on.

“ What in the world ! ” exclaimed James. “ Are you ill ? ” He swung out of bed, put on his dressing-gown, and fetched a brandy flask. Anthony, sitting in the chair, receiving the brandy and an encouraging pat on the shoulder, supposed that he must be ill ; realised, in fact, that he was, though it was curious, for that evening he felt in perfect health and spirits. But all his sensations and ideas were becoming fragmentary, and floating about seemingly above his head. James, reflecting that he had been so very busy lately as hardly to give Anthony a thought, began to think that perhaps the upstairs experiment was not turning out quite a success. He felt a slight reluctance, even at this moment, to put Anthony into his own bed, but he would not, of course, keep the boy up while another was being prepared, so he assisted Anthony into it, and aroused a sleepy manservant with orders to make up one for himself next door. He stood with his hands in his dressing-gown pockets, greatly concerned, and rather fussy and dictatorial. He checked Anthony with some soothing admonition as his head moved on the pillow and Anthony murmured at random, “ I wish to God Henry was my father.” But meanwhile the delicious comfort of the bed was enwrapping him in a dream. James took the observation in perfectly good part, and

decided that he would take the boy away to-morrow, if he were fit to stand it.

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James took Anthony down to Brighton, and left him with Ivan Archer, having prepaid a fortnight's account at the Royal York Hotel, and the stinging air and the blue sea under its twinkling diamond set made an atmosphere in which all the senses were invigorated. Anthony, breakfasting by the open windows, sun-bathing, gossiping with Ivan Archer, improved rapidly. He began to draw some of the sketches for the fresco he was projecting for M. Sureau's house, and the exhilaration he felt in being at last settled down to work acted admirably on the work itself. Ivan was an agreeable companion, and one particularly acceptable at the moment, for he was accustomed to making himself thoroughly comfortable wherever he went ; they drove about in carriages with awnings striped like bullseyes, and Anthony could hardly realise that this was the identical season in which he had been living under skies of veiled heat and in vistas of house-walls dove-coloured in the shade. Here the whole scene was sparkling with a sugary brightness like a crystallised pear. Ivan used to lean on his stick and watch the progress of the sketches ; he admitted that they were motivated, and seemed to show ideas ; but he thought Anthony overrated in his own circle ; the qualities which captivated M. Sureau, whose appreciation of pictures was almost purely literary, was to Ivan and his friends merely a defective execution, whose charm depended on its viciousness. However, he said nothing of this, but merely encouraged Anthony where he could. Although he was to all appearances the strong,

independent member of the party, deeply browned by the sun, merry, extremely hungry, and dressed in the smartest of white trousers and buckskin shoes, he was conscious of a suspicion and dread which made him feel craven beside Anthony. He was always very much disturbed whenever any of his acquaintances showed a disposition to marry. He himself was so utterly given up to philandering with young women, and had so many arguments with which to combat mothers, aunts, jealous friends, and interfering opinion in every quarter, that the sight of one of his friends undertaking to marry seemed an argument against him, on the side of public opinion, the weight of which, though he denied it, unconsciously staggered him. It attacked his deep-seated theory of existence, and produced a sensation of affright which found vent in dictatorialness, satire, and a general exaggeration of his ordinary behaviour. There was only one consolation in such a case, and that was that he felt at liberty to flirt with an engaged girl to the fullest extent without the fear of incurring any responsibility. He justified this proceeding by saying that, the practice of society being to form a ring round a young couple and seclude them from any company but their own, anyone who broke through the ring and kept them in touch with things, and at the same time gave them an opportunity of testing their standard of values as regards each other, was doing them a great service. If, as occasionally happened, a match was broken off in consequence of his altruistic services, he became quite glowing with a consciousness of benevolent wisdom.

Though Anthony had said nothing about his intentions in any quarter, Ivan felt uneasy ; and as they lay on the downs, Anthony pale and attenuated, but



drawing busily with a frowning but serene expression, like that of an occupied child, Ivan, propped up on his elbow, would embark in endless disquisition on the drawbacks of the married state ; the unreliable nature of young women in general, the fallacies of public opinion, and the impossibility of ever knowing how things would turn out. His fine profile against the gorse was heavy and desperate looking ; Anthony, a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, would mumble acquiescence without having given a great deal of attention, and then roll over and go to sleep till it was time to drive back to the hotel and watch the girls in their thin dresses dancing among the tea-tables with plates of iced bananas and little horns filled with wild strawberries.

James, it was understood, was making arrangements to have Anthony's room—the condition of which, upon inspection, had appalled him—thoroughly put to rights, and was offering to find and rent a studio in which Anthony might work and make the confusion necessary to a painter, while keeping his room free from it. James had, in fact, thoroughly taken up the matter. Anthony should have been pleased ; in a way he was relieved ; but the sense of inferiority which so often exasperated him in his dealings with his family was irritated by this stepping in and taking control of his affairs. And, while he daily became browner and firmer at Brighton, his temper became shorter and shorter ; he came back, in fact, in a condition alert and testy.

The person who felt the effects of the alteration most was Fanny. When he called to see her after his three weeks' absence, with his reddish beard a little longer and cut into a sharp point, she realised the difference

almost with a shock. She felt that she failed to please him, and, instead of being more or less indifferent to such a state of affairs, or, as would have been natural after the place he had lately begun to occupy in her feelings, mildly sorry, she was instead nervous, almost frightened. The comparative tranquillity into which she had lately settled was giving place to a state of nervous excitement and sustained restlessness. All her pleasure in life had for a long time been centred around the person of Roger—in the society of people who were akin to him, reflecting his miraculous charm ; in æsthetic experiences in which she would feel that she was benefiting by his influence—and of all these sources of pleasure Anthony was the only one that she could enjoy with calmness. He was indeed the one which affected her the least ; his presence afforded her a kind of solace in the maze of all this ardour and distress. But now this was gone, and on all sides she felt perpetually nervous and aroused.

Anthony took her to lunch at his relations' house ; in this he was encouraged by Deborah, who had, though so long ago that she had almost forgotten it, originally discovered Fanny in a tea-party given by Miss Corder ; she had been favourably impressed, and invited her on the spur of the moment to that fatal party last summer. She herself had been from home when the party was actually given, and having enquired from Athene whether Fanny had made an appearance, and learning from her that no such person had been present, and not happening to run into Fanny again, had naturally dropped the slight thread of this acquaintance. She remembered the girl, however, when Henry told her about his visit, and as they both discussed the affair, and Anthony's prospects, they

agreed that a little, very discreet encouragement, might be the thing.

Fanny did not know anything of this, and regarded the invitation as something in which all the pleasure was conferred on her, and none at all by her. She knew from Anthony's conversation that Roger was abroad for a fortnight, otherwise she did not think that she could have borne the agitation of going to the house ; as it was, she was almost too much moved to behave with the necessary composure. She had not been there since that night, and she was surprised to see that the hall was quite different from what she had remembered! They did not, of course, go into Roger's room, but only into the dining-room, and the little morning-room afterwards. Besides herself and Anthony there were Athene and Deborah, and a young woman called Mrs. Harrison. She was broad and loose-limbed, and wore the fashionable skin-tight flannel suit with an elaborate vest and rows of pearls, below an attractive painted face and flaxen hair. Her fussy, fashionable clothes and loud voice surprised Fanny at first ; the girl was perfectly at home, and made trite or stupid remarks that nevertheless sounded attractive because of her highly coloured cheek-bones and the deep, husky tones of her voice. Athene appeared to regard her with delicate and smiling curiosity, but with friendliness, a charming playfulness. She talked to her more than to anyone else, drawing her out, and, since she was one of those who are always making some obvious statement in conversation which others foresee immediately but which the speaker has to work up to in a slow and ordered manner, a good part of the luncheon conversation {consisted in Fanny's and Anthony's sitting nervously on their chairs while Mrs. Harrison laboured

through the steps to her unnecessary goal. Everyone liked her none the less, and when Fanny answered the questions and remarks of Deborah, she felt that her own small voice and slight replies were uninteresting by being too sensible. How noble it seemed to be able to ask for more vegetables, as Mrs. Harrison did, and to be supplied, with little apologetic murmurs. Fanny, so far from being in a condition to ask for vegetables, could not even want them. Whenever Athene turned from the sculptured hair waves and artificial pearls of Mrs. Harrison and addressed her, Fanny felt that in the mere turning from one side of the table to the other a subtle change took place. There was the same friendliness, but in reserve, suspense ; no attempt made at encouragement ; a word or two dropped with a little tinkle like ice. Anthony talked impartially to both his aunts about people she had never met, sometimes never heard of. He suffered the same difficulty in combining with society as they did, and showed it with all the crudeness of the rather egotistical young man.

After lunch it was better ; they sat about in the little room drinking their coffee, and discussed Richardson. And Fanny thought, even while she was conscious of joining more easily, and even well, in the conversation, " How wrong it is only to be able to talk to them like this ; about Richardson of all people." But directly the topics ceased to be impersonal, and concerned their doings or her own, her interest became so intense, so painful, that, with the repression she was forced to put upon herself, she stopped everything. She would have asked nothing better than to talk about seaside holidays, jam-making, or the summer sales, but she was forced to give all her attention to keeping up the subject of Clarissa, though what they all said began to

sound unreal, because Mrs. Harrison—whose authors were Jeffrey Farnol and W. J. Locke—could not join in it. Mrs. Harrison herself, however, was not in the least put out. She sat with one well-turned leg crossed over the other, smiling and thinking that Fanny looked rather a sweet kid, and must be quite clever.

When they were alone in Deborah's bedroom settling their hats, she repainted her bright rose-pink lips and said :

“ You don't make up, do you ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I do sometimes. In the evening.”

“ In the evening ! What a kid you are ! Of course you look all right without it, but I'd be dreadful if I didn't put some on.”

“ I'm sure you wouldn't be.”

“ Very nice of you to say so, but you haven't seen me in the morning.” She pushed the lipstick back into its gilt case and stowed it in her hand-bag.

“ I haven't seen you here before, have I ? Do you know them well ? ”

“ Not very.”

“ The boy brought you, didn't he ? Is he nice ? ”

“ Yes, he is rather.”

“ Do you like the others ? ”

In the privacy composed of the solitude of the bedroom and the fact that Mrs. Harrison was a perfect stranger, Fanny ventured to indulge this burning curiosity.

“ Yes,” she said in a muffled tone. “ Do you ? ”

“ Oh, yes,” said the other airily, “ they're dears.”

She had been repaid for her venture, certainly. This was so strange a way of looking at them that she felt she should never have done turning it over in her mind. They went out into the hall, and Anthony, nervously

propitiatory, praised some stuffed owls in a case which a friend had just sent them from the north. Both the Misses Simon followed them to the doorstep. They each bent down to shake hands, Deborah silent but cordial, Athene with that fleeting, alarming smile, the lift of the upper lip. Glancing back, Fanny saw the two sisters turn towards each other and walk back into the hall, their heads turned together in conversation.

For a few moments she was obliged to linger on the pavement in chat with Mrs. Harrison ; the weather, the ladders in silk stockings, and swimming in the Highgate baths. The latter went off, thinking that she was certainly a nice little thing, only not very much in her. Then she was able to turn homewards, drawn together, and remaining with her mind poised on that last instant. It was impossible to say whether her company had been put up with or had really made a part of the scene for them. The farewell had been equivocal ; they had expressed no hope that she would come again, even with Anthony, as would have been natural—but there was just that much glint and warmth in the moment that seemed to suggest that this wish was merely unspoken. As she went along, balancing herself on the edge of the curb, and dwelt again on the mysterious reflected pleasure that had glanced through her like rays in noticing some particular motion of the head, inflection of voice, or the sudden droop of the steep eyelids, and, far beneath her embarrassment and constraint, the divine sensation, the stirring of a buried joy, of being in the place that was most familiar to him, of seeing so intimately what he had seen and would again (the gilt-framed patches of blue Mediterranean, the airy branches of the bronze candelabra, the line of the window-sill, the light



pouring in on the pale bright wall), that it seemed an action shared with him ; it was almost a resurrection.

But even before she had walked home she was despising and reproaching herself for this passionate, abandoned feeding on a single scene, the morbid analysis of word and gesture—feverish, degrading, almost obscene. But what am I to do ? she thought. When I see so little, how can I help overvaluing it ? If my intercourse were not confined to these breathless flashes, I could be calm and simple, and the memories would rise up as infinitely secret, exquisite, and tranquil, and I could linger on them without reproach. As it was, the fragile structure of her mind—"I am deplorable," she thought—failed in the effort, became submerged, and she was helpless in the torments of wondering what exactly had been thought, what was even now being said.

Quite suddenly, and as an outcome, perhaps, of unrealised fatigue, she thought how much she would like to have a brother or a sister ; usually she had been glad to have none, to be entirely private, and particularly since this experience, to every aspect of which she was so sensitive that she blushed and quailed even at the tacit understanding that her dearest, invaluable Emma knew something of it, and which she tried to think altogether hidden, except in vague outline, from the alarming Helena. But now she felt, with a touch of rueful amusement, that it would be pleasant to have someone who would be glad to hear one talk unreservedly, someone in that mysterious intimacy of blood who would know so much that explanation would be unnecessary, whose ideas and tastes were the same as one's own, only superior ; it would be an unspeakable boon to have such a person,

who would be as glad of one's company as one was anxious to give it.

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Roger came back from France, where he had spent three weeks on examining some documents in a private museum. He was impatient to return and spend a good long time quietly at home, writing up his research, and he could not bear to waste the few liquid days of perfect summer that fall out in London during the year. A season of mild festivities inaugurated his return ; Deborah and Athene, both looking very brown and wicked, were consulting little note-books, for so many of their amusing friends seemed to be demanding their attention at the same time, and unpacking a consignment of little iridescent glass plates, which they thought, since the weather was so warm, would be very useful for strawberries or oddments, and which gave a very joyous, fête-like air to the house. A few telephone calls were unavoidable, but he purposely kept his return unannounced as long as possible ; just to have these few hot, silent, tranquil days in the complete freedom and repose of family intercourse. Henry, looking rather worn, as everyone was sorry to see, could only join them in the evenings, but in the delicious hours after seven he sat with Roger by the tall, open windows while they indulged in that disjointed, exclamatory conversation that brothers find so satisfying. The tree-tops in the square swayed gently, now solid hills, now falling torrents of green leaves, with the sparkle of the setting sun behind them. Roger was so much more striking to the eye when both were together—dark hair, darkish beard instead of blond, more fantastic eyebrows, the curve of a rainbow, eyes not the acute, dark grey that

reflected the impression derived of everything they saw, responding, making in their changing, mirroring experience the completing of the thing that was seen, but an unchanging, greenish darkness that saw everything and gave back nothing in return.

Deborah was answering notes at the table behind them, and joining in the conversation now and again ; Henry, refilling his pipe, recommending a hair-lotion and dissenting strongly from his brother's views on, United Molasses ("not to be touched," he said), introduced the subject of Anthony and his affairs. He started to describe Fanny, but, with the almost supernatural instinct of his family for avoiding telling other people what they knew already, he added, "But I believe you know her?"

"Yes," said Roger. There was a moment's silence ; then he turned round to the room.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Deborah. "She came to lunch the other day."

"Were you pleased with her?"

"Yes, very. We thought she was very nice."

"And Lydia?" said Roger quickly.

"We've asked her to come to lunch to-morrow."

"I suppose, James," he began, but he was obliged to listen to a discussion between Deborah and Henry of how suitable some such match for Anthony would be ; he could not join it—but it would hardly be expected of him, having just arrived home and not being as yet *au fait* with the events during his absence. He walked out on to the balcony, and leaned his arms on the railings. He didn't know what to think ; his mind was suspended. Around his head the heavy tree-tops darkened and murmured, here and there thinning

out and holding up delicate still patterns against the sun. Down below, the pavements were silent, and the area railings glinted in a last ray. In the depth and quietude he hung midway, wondering, vaguely distressed. There was always some air of melancholy about a summer evening under tree-tops, he thought.

The next day Lydia arrived, brought by James, delighted to see Roger, who had brought her *L'Ami du Nord*, enclosed in a transparent wrapper, a pair of gloves stamped with little gilt moons which Madame Sureau had assured him would be just the thing, and also a quantity of illustrated papers and the remains of a box of Nonettes de Dijon. The papers she intended to use as material for her scrap-book. The Nonettes she said she would keep for James to have with his coffee ; she thought he was getting rather peckish.

"Really," said Roger. "I'm sorry."

"Anthony is so tiresome," she explained in her high, tiny accents, which were always listened to with indulgence. "He really wears us all out."

"I understood that he was rather better."

"We *hope* so," said Lydia, with the sort of resigned emphasis used by grandmothers. Roger was leaning forward with his hands on his knees, his head turned to the window.

"Have you met his friend?" he asked, in his clear, unmodulated tones. Lydia raised her eyebrows and her restless shoulders.

"He has so many ; they really are too odious. One can't very well . . ."

"Yes, I know, but this one isn't like the others, I think."

"I'm glad to hear it. Who is it?" The sharpness of

her tones was an unconscious reply to the significant softness and quietness of his. He paused.

“ Her name is Fanny Arne ; I don’t know who she is exactly.” Lydia was conscious of a distinct pang of jealousy ; she paid no attention to her uncle’s admiration of people older than herself ; she thought his tastes erratic, but she ignored them. But this special mention of someone of her own age—she had never had any experience of that most trying rivalry of all, that of people of one’s own age and sex. She had no sooner recognised her feeling, however, than she at once suppressed it as hateful and unworthy. She said she would be interested to see Fanny, and determined that she would approach Anthony in some way as soon as an opportunity offered. It came the next Saturday, for Anthony was going to bring her to an exhibition in the Leicester Galleries, and readily agreed to meet his sister there. Athene, who was looking over a pile of papers for Miss Corder in a corner of the sofa, said mildly :

“ Perhaps you would like to lunch here first ? Don’t bother if you have anything else to do.”

“ I should love to,” answered Lydia, with her ecstatic little shrug, and a little later she received a note from Lady Neville saying that if she could manage to return her books to *The Times* Library at a particular time on Saturday morning Lady Neville would be delighted with an opportunity of taking her out to coffee and returning to lunch in her company. Lydia regarded this as a piece of betrayal by Athene, and was in no very good humour when she espied Lady Neville returning her pile of biography and travels to the assistant, and remonstrating about the non-appearance of various works on early collections of

postage stamps and diamond-mining in Peru. Lady Neville at once distinguished the very tenuous young person huddled up in a pale dust-coat and shaded by an almost fantastically beautiful black hat, and allowed her to walk three times round the shelves, despairingly clasping a couple of novels, and finally to come up with a politely simulated little start of recognition, all without the faintest alteration of her usual sardonic and almost Rabelaisian good humour.

"I have collected my books," she announced, tucking two thick volumes under one arm and putting a third into a leather bag. "Are you supplied? I see you are." They walked down the steps, and Lydia said, in a meek and despairing voice :

"Let me take your books."

"No, my dear," answered the old lady, who had her scruples, though they were not perhaps very many. "We will each bear our own burdens—soldiers on the march!" Lydia wondered fretfully for the hundredth time what on earth was responsible for this woman's influence with Athene. "Soldiers on the march!" She talked like one of those people in striped cotton dresses who are put in charge of Sunday-school treats. But how irresistible! She felt borne along like a straw on a torrent. She had not even the consolation of feeling that at least her subjugation was only physical—of keeping her judgment in reserve against her. For while they sat drinking coffee in Buszard's, which Lydia would have liked to decline but was as powerless to do so as she would have been if it had been twelve years ago and Lady Neville was offering her a glass of milk, she was obliged to admit that Lady Neville had the fascination of a vigorous and original intellect which, though uncultivated in Lydia's sense of the



word, unfashionable, was yet shapely and disciplined ; and that she could see—what she had only pretended in a moment of petulance not to see—that she and Athene met together on the ground of singularly acute and penetrating perceptions and a quality of common sense almost amounting to genius.

They came out of Buszard's and started to walk rapidly up the interminable length of New Oxford Street, while Lady Neville told a story about a man she knew who was cutting down his own fir-trees, and who went out every day dressed in brown corduroy trousers, just like a labourer, with his lunch done up in a little package, and sawed away with might and main until——

Lydia was wondering whether Athene would be cross if she were to be really rude ; Athene never was cross in the ordinary sense, but, though inwardly there was great sympathy between them, outwardly Athene was impressive enough, and had a sufficient degree of nervous irritability, to make even Lydia a little wary ; and her unvarying politeness, and her freedom from any kind of presuming, was felt by Athene to be one of the delightful features of their intercourse. She came out of her reverie, saying, " Yes, indeed," at the point where the man with the fir-trees had made some reference to Mr. Gladstone, and, not being any longer diverted by her chain of thought, realised that she was disliking the exertion of walking up New Oxford Street excessively.

" Shan't we take a bus ? " she asked hopefully.

" Bus ! " exclaimed Lady Neville. " We want no bus ! " and set out with renewed agility ; Lydia was helpless. Whirled along by this venerable tornado, she finally arrived at the house, and was looked at with a

mocking glint in the eye by Athene for seeming so gloomy, while Lady Neville was conducted upstairs with the usual murmurs and short laughs. It was too much. Consequently when, later in the afternoon, she met Anthony and Fanny in the Leicester Galleries, she was already prepared to be unfavourably impressed. She relapsed into what was, often from shyness, her usual manner with strangers—one of complete silence, only broken by sharp questions : “ Why shouldn’t it be ? ” if someone remarked that in shapes the Derain was rather clumsy. Anthony, nervous at being responsible for the proximity of the two young women, wandered about by himself, staring lackadaisically at the pictures and thinking what a silly business it all was. To Fanny this behaviour of them both struck the heaviest dismay. The planet that had lighted her existence had, in the course of its aerial progress round the heaven, shot off this little fragment on to her path, and it was hard and chill as death. As they moved uncertainly about the room, she dared not open her lips unasked, for she was so panic-stricken that she knew any remark she made would sound like an attempt at propitiation, and she had still enough self-possession to see that this would be a fatal error of tact and taste. Her mouth felt dry and hard and her temples damp ; she felt that in this one moment all the fears and doubts, the difficulties and suspense she had always felt to be inherent in her having anything to do with them, had crystallised. She was now seeing how impossible it really was to scale the precipitous cliffs that surrounded the sanctuary of her love. When they had fatigued and exasperated themselves for half an hour, a general move was made to abandon the picture gallery. It might have been supposed—indeed, it had originally

been said—that Fanny and Anthony were to go off to tea. Actually, however, partly through the insanity of nervousness on Fanny's part, partly on account of Anthony's uneasiness and anxiety to put himself right with Lydia, it ended by Fanny's going off alone, leaving Anthony escorting Lydia, still silent and glittering-eyed, holding out one long and pallid little hand and saying "*Good-bye.*"

As she hurried down Green Street, her head bent in the teeth of a sudden storm of rain, she realised that the last hour had reduced a rational and intelligent being to a contemptible object which, if it were despised, was so with every reason. To have stayed for half an hour in a state of acute and perpetual uneasiness, amounting at most to anguish, to have been conscious of a fresh access of nerves every time she ventured to pass from one picture to the next—it reminded her of the little mermaid treading on knives. She slipped into a bus that was gliding round Trafalgar Square, and the simile still pursued her.

"*'Oh,'*" she thought, "*'if he knew that to be with him I have given up my voice for ever !'*"

\* \* \*

In the middle of their domestic pleasures it came as a shock to everyone when Athene was suddenly removed to have what was gracefully termed "*a slight operation.*"

"*But,*" exclaimed the unhappy Fanny, meeting with Henry Simon on the pavement, as he was putting his attaché-case and overcoat in the back seat of his car, "*she was quite well the other day.*"

Henry, looking out over the street, but kindly bending down to listen at the same time, replied :

"She has been feeling a little unwell for some time, but she did not want anyone to know or to be worried."

"I'm so sorry. I do so hope she will be better soon."

"Thank you. I daresay she will. We aren't at all—alarmed." He smiled, and got into the car, and she turned and retraced her steps. She had come, after considerable nerving of herself to the effort, to call on Athene, who had said, "You must look in one day and tell me some more about it." She thought that if she were to look in, naturally and simply, and all were to go well, she would come away feeling refreshed and with her self-respect somewhat repaired after that fatal day in the Leicester Galleries. In pursuance of this idea, she had worked at the office with remarkable steadiness and attention, and had come out on Saturday morning ready poised for flight. This set-back left her trembling and desolate ; it emphasised her feeling of isolation even more than the encounter with Lydia ; she had not even known that this thing might happen. In her last meeting with Athene she had treated her as if nothing were the matter—she had been allowed to do so ; but, over and above the mortification, she realised through the week how deeply she had longed for, how desperately she had clung to, the consolation that once more she would meet that creature that was all she had now that really represented the whole point of her existence, and tempered perhaps to that ethereal mildness that formed her only solace.

Providence having arranged for both Henry and Deborah to be at home when this crisis occurred, the prostrate Miss Simon had been properly whisked away to a nursing-home in Marylebone. Here, when they had slightly operated on her, they deposited her in a room with resolutely restful green walls, looking

heartrendingly frail and limp, and here, on the day after the event, Roger came walking up the street in silent agitation, wearing his customary large felt hat, and carrying a bouquet of tulips and roses.

These things were terrifying, not because anything serious was the matter, but because they brought one face to face with that prospect which the whole of civilised life is spent in tacitly ignoring—the interminable never, never which the human mind can scarcely envisage in the full force of its terror and its anguish. It is folly to think about it, he thought. Perhaps when one is dead one doesn't mind, or one is altered to suit existing circumstances, but the prospect of a world in which he would have to live without her was so intolerable that he was conscious of sickening shoots and contractions in his heart, as if he were walking on a precipice.

He spent hours sitting by her bed ; the full, secret movements of their thoughts flowed on side by side in silent eddies ; at long intervals a movement of his chair or two words joined between them rose to the surface of the world, as a crest of white foam rises, fluttering softly on a dark torrent. While he sat there, the room was a scene of exquisite, inviolable privacy ; but when she was quite alone, the constant dread of interruption, of hot-water cans and tea-trays and thermometers, prevented her from entering the enchanted languors of complete solitude. Henry looked in from time to time when he could spare a moment, and was greeted with deference by the nurses. Deborah's visits were frequent, but not tiresomely so, and exhaled an atmosphere of kindly vigour that was felt to be very bracing for the patient ; she frequently brought a little suit-case containing two or three of the clean nightgowns, with

their small frills and elbow sleeves, and a pile of fresh handkerchiefs ; on one occasion Lydia had added a cask of bath dusting powder that smelt of crocuses.

But Roger was a thorn in the nurses' flesh. " It fairly gives me the pip to see him come mooning up the stairs," said Nurse Jennings rudely, and she told the sister that he and Miss Simon were as neurotic as you liked, the pair of them. Now her sister, they considered, she was the one. So considerate and sensible, and so grateful for everything that was being done. Even Roger's anxious deference to them did nothing for him ; on his next visit he was told that the patient was doing well, but seemed low-spirited ; " Nice bright conversation, that's what she wants," they said. " She's quite all right, but she wants rousing," they told him.

Did she ? She did not look as if she wanted it very much. Still, he thought it might be right, perhaps, to do what they said. He walked hesitatingly across the area of blue linoleum and floral patterned mats.

" I have been told to *rouse* you," he said. She gave him her old wicked smile.

" How very alarming ! " she murmured.

He sat down in the armchair beside her, and his face, framed by the determinedly cheerful cushions of green and pink casement cloth, looked so pained and dolorous that she laughed outright. Something rose to his lips, but her face changed. Her eyes grew fixed, and an expression of hard agony stretched her face ; a second later a stream of dark blood glided out of the corner of her mouth. He pressed the bell lying on the pillow and held the sheet to her face, though whether to assist her or to hide the frightful thing from himself he never knew.

" Don't do that," cried the nurse at his elbow ; two



of them were bending over the bed. "You'd better wait outside a few minutes," said the other hastily. They were lifting her up, and as he went out he caught a glimpse over their shoulders of her sightless face.

When he had achieved the bottom stair he was obviously so faint that the two little probationers on duty in the hall hurried up to him and led him, each taking an elbow, to a corner where there was a screen and an armchair and a diminutive gas-fire popping and glowing. One of them quickly returned with a glass of water on a tray and administered it to him. The extra heat of the little fire in the dark corner comforted him, and he revived. He sat nursing the glass in his hand ; the fire filled it with red-gold streaks and bubbles melting into shivers of crystal. Presently he was allowed to walk upstairs again and say good-bye before she was settled down for a sleep. She wasn't to see anyone else that day. Her appearance restored him somewhat, but as he went home he dwelt so deeply on it all that every memory of any relation with another person was completely excluded from his mind.

\* \* \*

When Fanny came out of the office rather late on next Thursday evening and found Anthony waiting on the pavement, she felt nothing but a rather slight and melancholy dissatisfaction at the sight of him. He came up at once and said, "Fanny, can you come out to tea?"

"But I've had it in the office ages ago," she objected.

"Can't you come out and have some more, then?"

"It would spoil my supper."

Anthony looked distracted.

"I wish to goodness I could ask you to supper, but I have got to . . ."

"It's very nice of you," she said composedly, "but I couldn't in any case, as I am expecting Emma."

"What I really wanted to ask was," he continued, turning round and accompanying her, "are you fond of swimming?"

Fanny considered.

"Well," she said, "I am not exactly fond of it, but I don't mind it if the bath is warm and it is a nice day."

("Good God," thought Anthony, "I'm damned if I put up with this!") "Well, look here," he said aloud, "some of us are going to the Paddington Baths on Friday evening; I wondered if you would come too."

"Which of you are going?" asked Fanny, not because she wanted to know, but because it put off having to answer either way.

"Oh, well," said Anthony, "Cedric Hayes and his wife. Do you know them? They are quite harmless. And old Ellis, that fat chap with curly hair you saw at our first party. Writes those rotten little books in the 'Where are We?' series. And I expect Deborah will come too, because she is very keen on that sort of thing, and—and I expect that will be all really. We don't want too many."

He looked so very anxious for her to say yes that she thanked him and promised to join the party on condition that she didn't have earache the night before, and sped off down Montague Street without waiting to see where he was going, leaving him in a state of pique and determination. Ever since he had seen Fanny's bare feet on the occasion of her sprained ankle he had been thinking how he could possibly repeat the experience, and the idea of a swimming-bath seemed a

positive inspiration. One could simply ask for nothing better—that was to say, not at present. He was anxious to secure the co-operation of Deborah for a variety of reasons. She would make everything go better for one thing, and make the proceedings more important and worth asking people to. When he asked her, she said she would be very much pleased to come, and as for Mr. Ellis, he was enthusiastic at the prospect of bathing with the ladies. He said, "This is a very clever scheme of yours, Anthony," and he blew out his chest, and ran upstairs to look out his American two-piece bathing-costume the minute Anthony had left the house.

The Friday evening was very fine and tranquil, and everyone was pleasantly overheated by the time they were arrived in the spacious marble entrance-hall, with its clammy air and its distant sounds of shrieks and splashes. Anthony and Mr. Ellis bought the tickets, while Mr. Hayes and his wife stood a little apart with very dashing bathing clothes hung over their arms. They were both pallid and fair-haired, and were always being overlooked or mistaken for someone else. This was partly because they were so correct and faithful in their adherence to what was fashionable that they were absorbed in their surroundings like chameleons, and it was a matter of equal pleasure or indifference to most people whether they were there or not. Meanwhile, Deborah and Mr. Ellis were making merry with each other, and, when Fanny rather uncertainly climbed the stairs to the entrance-hall, she saw them spluttering and laughing, engaged in emphatic, ponderous, and mannered jokes, Mr. Ellis because he always did and Deborah assenting out of sheer inattentiveness and spirits. Fanny had been struggling with

herself all the way against the ridiculous notion that possibly Roger might be there. As if he would not have been much too shy to go into a public bath ; as if he didn't hate bathing in any case ; as if, if he were out anywhere, it would not be with Athene in the nursing-home, or at a hundred other different places ! But when she reached the hall and looked round, it was in a spasm of pure, irrational, unbearable desire just to see his head somewhere, turned sideways perhaps with the thrust of his chin that always made his beard stick out from his soft collar, and gave his head the tournure of some Renaissance poet's, drawn in cornelian chalk in a circle of laurel-leaves. As her eyes travelled round the scene and saw nothing but the guichet and the inner door, and the hopeless walls and corners, she could not even compose herself enough to feel that she had never expected them to be blessed with anything. She then saw the two Hayes standing with their striped towels, and caught the wearisome frivolity of Mr. Ellis in which Deborah seemed immersed, and it seemed to her, as the strong barren light from outside made her blink and Anthony put a dampish pink ticket into her hand and led the way towards the region of splashes and deep echoing cries, that there was nothing in life at all that was not intolerably flat and stupid, and hopeless of giving joy. They all went into separate little cubicles, moist and steaming, shut in with doors of close zenana-like lattice-work. They gradually reassembled on the slippery brink of the deep green vault of water—the two Hayes, Mr. Ellis and Deborah, the latter divested of her spectacles and wearing a red rubber cap of the same shape as the white linen erections worn by chefs, the effect of which was monstrous but not unsuccessful. Anthony padded out, shivering

in a bright blue bathing-dress, carrying in his hand a pair of bathing-shoes with long ribbons.

"You don't want *those*, my dear," exclaimed Deborah, pointing to them.

Anthony looked at them.

"Don't I?" he said. "All right, then"; and returned with them to his cabin. He did not discriminate. Bathing was bathing, and he brought to it all the apparatus he had as a matter of course. They got into the bath by degrees, avoiding collision with the streaming wet napes, shining bosoms, frowning red faces, and multi-coloured caps. The Hayes potttered about the sides; Deborah swam lustily across the bath and back again; while the sight of Mr. Ellis would have disarmed his severest critics. He was transformed into an elderly and seraphic water-baby. Anthony, meanwhile, slipped into the solid green waves and swam about anxiously waiting for Fanny's appearance. He swam down to the shallow end and then turned to look back. But at that distance he could distinguish nothing among the confused medley of heads, so he travelled slowly up again, but there was no sign of her. However, he might have expected she would dawdle, disobliging little creature. He clung to a loop of the chain, and admired the exploits of Mr. Ellis, who waddled up to the highest eminence marked "For experienced divers only," and dived in repeatedly and as coolly as a wag-tail. Deborah, poised in the water, with one hand grasping the step, and watching the fun, suddenly turned her dripping face round to Anthony and said:

"Where is your young lady?"

Anthony looked round again, and Deborah pushed off, supposing she must be somewhere among the welter of heads. It wasn't likely that she was lying at the

bottom of the bath, though such things, she believed, were known to happen. Her real compunction arose from the feeling that she hadn't taken any notice of her so far, and she not only believed the girl to be attached to the family and pleased with attention, but she felt also that if she were really going to take up Anthony she deserved it. She had assented to the swimming-party partly because she thought it would be a good opportunity of showing her some friendliness. She swam about, puffing out her cheeks, and presently stood up on the side, a very handsome figure in her chef's red rubber hat, with her long limbs and delicate hands and feet, and her torso with its rather ample bosom looking like polished black marble in the wet bathing-suit ; she turned round to catch a glimpse of Anthony, but he had clambered out on the opposite side.

Having frantically scanned the whole bath for the tenth time, and assured himself by the clock that it was now twenty minutes since their entering the water, he went up to the door marked 17, and was going to call through it, when it opened, and Fanny stood before him, completely dressed. For a moment he was too much startled to say anything. Then he asked hurriedly, "Are you ill?" He hoped, of course, that she wasn't, only if she had been—there are always things one can do for a person who is ill, even if it is only fetching someone to do them.

"No," she said, looking sideways over his shoulder.

"Then why——" he gasped, looking at the neat, unruffled little bundle of her towel and bathing-dress.

"I'm so sorry," she said, in a silvery, expressionless voice, "but I felt so chilly when it came to the point, I simply couldn't." The consciousness of behaving badly and the need to assert herself made her disguise her



real shame and trepidation, and appear cool and detached.

"Well," said Anthony, in a voice of suppressed annoyance, "don't wait for us." He never dreamed but that she would.

She replied, however :

"Well, thank you, perhaps I will be getting back, then," and walked glidingly away.

"What was the matter ?" asked Deborah, hurriedly coming up, followed by Mr. Ellis. "Wasn't she feeling well ?"

"She said she didn't feel like it after all," said Anthony.

Deborah sat down on the steps a little blankly.

"Well," she said, "we seem to have got it wrong." Anthony said nothing, but turned away looking white and furious.

For ten days following, Fanny was conscious of having behaved so badly that she was not surprised at not seeing anything of Anthony ; she had heard vaguely that he was going abroad, and supposed he might possibly have gone already. She did not wonder at his not having said good-bye ; what could he have done with a person who behaved as she did ? Even if she had been able to explain that her fainéance had not been pure caprice and rudeness, but a deadly, overpowering sensation of despair, would that have made it any better ? And their recent meetings had been so unsatisfactory that she had quite decided that he was much too irritated and disgusted to have anything more to do with her. She was beginning almost to think of this as a good thing, as the strain of the contact with his relations that was the consequence of their intercourse was becoming something that it was drastically

necessary to relieve. This was brought home to her by her recent intercourse with Emma. No more, she realised with a pang, did Emma seek her out as an equal, a person whose company one sought for one's own sake. Emma, she had begun to perceive, now put aside times for seeing her, as she might have reserved Thursday afternoon for visiting someone in hospital. The conversation was always directed, she now recollected, into channels that were already known to interest her; it was not now a matter of Emma's introducing the subject that most interested herself at the moment, bringing it out for its objective interest. This state of things roused her almost more than anything else, and she immediately went down into the hall and rang up Emma's house, leaving a message with Mrs. Vining to say would Emma please spend Sunday with her and make the plans, because she wanted to be lively. The same evening Emma herself hurried round, remarkably attractive-looking in a new navy-blue coat with long, pale fawn silk legs and a little fawn hat. She had bought a little volume entitled *Ladies' Tales*, with 1714 on the title-page, and dedicated to Sarah Jennings.

"It's charming!" exclaimed Emma, turning over the pages. "'Some are wont to object that it is a sufficient study for Women to handle the Distaff and the Needle well. I likewise confess that their number is large and that the Inveterate Ill-Opinion and Mistaken Notions of our Times are too evident on their side.' I wonder why someone doesn't write a really amusing account of the Women's Movement?"

"It's such a cant name," said Fanny, "I expect the people who really are amusing are frightened off by it."

“ Trifling ! ” exclaimed Emma. “ But what are we to do to-morrow ? ” They decided that they would ride out past Hampstead on the top of a bus to have the view of the hills and groves that always seem hanging on the horizon, and that they would see whether Helena would be available afterwards to go to the cinema and see the production of *Anna Karenine*. “ But we will have the drive by ourselves,” they decided. The rest of the evening they spent in arguing about the Women’s Movement—Emma insisted on calling it that, and Fanny was obliged to acquiesce, being unable to produce anything better—and in breaking up two of Fanny’s necklaces to make two sets of smaller necklaces and bracelets ; a few large blue glass beads and one or two small red and milky ones Emma took home to sew on the corners of milk-covers.

The following week Fanny devoted herself so exclusively to the work of typing and filing in the office, readily undertaking the duties of substitute for Rosemary, who was away, and in her spare moments admiring the excellencies of Emma’s character and resolving to copy them, and reading two books she had lent her on the history of women, that she brought on a headache, and by next Saturday she was feeling low from a long period of unrest and a week’s overwork on the top of it, and the painful and irksome part of resolution remained while the stimulus had worn away. Her fortitude was at such a low ebb that everything was a trouble ; she turned with disgust and weariness from finishing the book on women—it was very silly ; Emma herself would have written a much better one. She could not summon up energy to polish the furniture or the silver, so the room had a rather doleful and forlorn appearance unusual to it ; she had meant to do several necessary

things, but had been defeated by her languidness, and now it was half-past four. Her thoughts, only half realised, ran on deep in her mind.

“I can’t cast myself adrift, because of the real thing ; that makes me upright. If it wasn’t real, or if I could dispossess it, I shouldn’t now be consciously taking up an existence from which I have agreed to banish my real pleasures. If I didn’t love him more, much more, than life itself, I should deliberately seek, and avail myself of, the company of the people round him, which I should enjoy in any circumstances ; I should be diverted, and forget him himself. But, as it is, I can’t look on anything so closely connected with him without too much emotion. And, loving him as I do, I can’t make myself abject, a wreck, a despicable object ; I can’t turn him into a cause of putrefaction and of horror. It’s better to put it all away, however painful, rather than be wicked, and not like him.” Though she didn’t suppose that it would be very painful at first. The painfulness of her meetings with them was uppermost in her mind at present, and she was too much enfeebled and depressed to remember the sharp, exquisite sensations of animation and of joy that constituted the pleasure of meeting them on equal terms. As for Anthony, the consciousness of having behaved badly at the swimming-party, and his neglect of her for the past fortnight, combined to make her think of him with irritation. She was leaning her aching head against the pane when the bell rang. Feeling quite overborne, with no spring left in her to respond to anything the next moment might present, she trailed downstairs and opened the door, to find Anthony, who was standing on the doorstep with a large bunch of white narcissi and yellow tulips.

"I wondered if you'd be at home," he said.

("I'll have to ask him to tea," she thought wearily.)

"Yes, do come in," she said, and immediately walked upstairs, again without waiting to appear conscious of his shutting the front door, as she knew would have been the proper thing.

"I'm afraid everything is at sixes and sevens," she murmured as he came in. "Are these for me? How lovely!" (Flowers, anyway, whoever brings them, are in themselves such wealth, such shining treasures of consolation.) She put them in water, and he relapsed into the armchair, forgetting, apparently, to take his hat off, staring and saying nothing.

She had not troubled to put on any of her necklaces, one of which she almost always wore; nothing, in fact, was quite as it should be; none of the particular little cares had been attended to. There was nothing for tea, either, except a plate of buttered scones, which, having been left over from yesterday, were now in a very unappetising condition; she put them on the table, with an almost empty pot of jam.

"This will finish him off," she thought, as she made the preparations in sulky silence. "He won't come again after this. Well, I can't help it." She put the flowers on the table, however, and their pale and glossy petals, their delicate sharpness, gave the scene a flippant and ghostly air. She felt so uncertain in her reactions that she was afraid that if she had to sit down opposite him and pour out tea while he was still wearing a hat she would burst out laughing. Fortunately, he seemed to remember it, and took it off before the tea was made. He ate very little. "I don't blame him," she thought, but she herself deliberately ate two pieces of scone, partly because, despite her headache, she was

feeling hungry, and partly from a defiant impulse to show that the food was at any rate good enough for her. He did not respond, either, to the scattered remarks she felt obliged to make, except in the shortest of sentences. As they both sat in silence, she felt that he was so deeply offended and disgusted with her that he must be permanently alienated. After the first tremor of nervousness that this idea aroused, she became perfectly resigned and even indifferent. Almost as soon as the last crumb was disposed of between them, he arose to go.

"I don't wonder," she thought. "This is good-bye, I suppose. I'm much too sodden to care. It's a good thing it happens now."

When they got down into the hall, he asked the porter to summon a taxi, and, as he immediately walked out and stood on the pavement, she felt obliged (particularly on account of the farewell nature of the proceedings) to follow him out and stand with him till the taxi should arrive. The autumn evening behind the drab chimney-pots paled into brighter purity in the silent pause such as sometimes occurs in a London street ; Fanny forgot to be even vaguely disturbed by Anthony's resolute silence. She was balancing on the curb when the taxi was heard approaching, wondering whether she would go out at once and buy some butter, or leave it till to-morrow. That would mean having to do without it at breakfast, but it would save having to get it now. On the other hand, the shop was such a short distance off that——

The loud whirring and the banging open of a door was upon her ; she was about to turn her head, when, with a breath-taking suddenness, she felt her shin scraped, her waist painfully hauled, and realised that



she herself was sailing down the street in the taxi, while Anthony wound his arms round her and covered her head with kisses, exclaiming "Fanny ! Fanny !"

She was so much astounded that she sat with her head a little on one side, gazing vacantly at the rapidly passing scene outside the window.

"Fanny !" cried Anthony. "I can't—I must—I must explain." He broke off and kissed her hands, while she wondered why it was that the wheel seemed to be going round over their heads.

"Fanny !" he said again. "Do please listen !" He was leaning over her with one knee on the floor. "I have been thinking—I have felt for a long time, only now I'm quite certain—I do so want you to marry me. I want you for always. I thought at first I wanted you just to be my wife, but I love you passionately—I want you so much. If you only knew how much I want to live with you ! This afternoon you were so perfect—the way you did everything. I couldn't take my eyes off you. For heaven's sake say if I can have you—please, for God's sake, say you'll try to——"

She covered up her face with her hands. Her brain was reeling, her head enveloped in roaring blackness ; his arms were strained tightly round her, but his hands cupped her shoulders and the back of her head with the most careful gentleness, and the light touch of his clothes as he bent over her were like the stirrings of infinite tenderness. If only he could know that he was driving her to the verge of sanity !

"What I am trying to tell you——" he began.

"Oh, stop, stop !" she cried. Anything to make him stop, be silent for a moment. "You must let me think, and you must leave me !"

"You will think?" he cried. "My darling, my angel—I can't live without you." His insistent tone aroused her from this darkened, terrifying state.

"Stop and let me get out," she said urgently, realising that she was already farther from home than she could decently walk without coat and hat.

"He'll take us back," said Anthony, unhooking the speaking-tube and addressing the broad back at the wheel. He sank back into the seat beside her, already the confident lover.

"Fanny," he babbled on, "this is the first time I have ever seen your neck without something round it. Just that gives me a feeling that this taxi is a far more intimate and private place than your room or mine or anywhere else that we've been so far. But I have left so much unsaid," he went on, gazing at her darkly flushed cheeks and unseeing eyes. His manner became at once more mature, more ceremonious, and with something of anxiety and distress in it. It was comparatively easy to take her off in a taxi—but suppose he were not to have her after all? He was thrown into a frightful extremity of doubt, which faded all his bright exultation; the horrid suspicion crept over his mind that perhaps this escapade was so indecorous and alarming that his real character would never be able to emerge from it. Why hadn't he made his addresses properly at the tea-table? This impulse had perhaps ruined his hopes for ever. Fanny was the last person, he felt, in a fever of nervous irritation against himself, to whom one should behave like this. She would never see, now, how sensitive he was to her personality, how discerning was his appreciation of her; they arrived once more at her door, and she sprang up. He was forced, despite his anxiety to treat her with reverential

courtesy, to take her round the waist in order to prevent her leaping out of the car.

"Fanny," he implored, "do tell me I may hope something ! This isn't no, is it ? "

"I can't say anything," she gasped. "I can't say anything now."

"When may I call ? To-morrow morning ? Ten ? Eleven ? Twelve ? "

"Twelve," she said, and, breaking from him, jumped out and ran upstairs ; she heard the departing taxi as she ran, taking him off.

But not in reality. He was here for ever now, if she wanted him. She came into the room spread with the remains of the tea-party ; it still preserved the silent, uncommunicative air it had worn during the meal. She came forward in a state of delirium ; the flowers turned away their heads with that remoteness that was so often seen in Athene's bearing. All round was stillness ; no one in sight, no one in hearing. Somewhere close enough, but so infinitely far away, those outposts of happiness were hidden ; if she wished it, she had but to say the word and her contact with them would no longer be a matter of short, terrifying, and exhausting moments, and scattered among endless delays in icy darkness. One asks so little, she reminded herself ; just the sight, the sound, is so inexpressibly precious.

But what would it mean ? What would it involve ? She sank down on the hearth-rug with her head in her hands ; she struggled to envisage the consequences ; but figures, images, memories, incoherent words of theirs, whirled round and round her brain, till suddenly she was conscious of nothing but alarm at the violent beating of her heart.

She tried to be honest ; she told him she didn't love him. She told him she had had someone else. He merely exclaimed :

" Surely we are not so unsophisticated ! We don't need to tell each other about our past affairs, do we ? You don't expect me to ask for bloom, like a Meredith hero, do you ? "

" Well, but, even so, do you want to marry a person who doesn't love you ? "

They were talking, as they had talked on Sunday morning and on Monday and Tuesday evening, in her room. He came over to the sofa she was sitting on and took her in his arms.

" You are so full of notions, Fanny," he said. " I daresay you don't feel about me as a romantic sort of creature like you would feel you *ought* to feel for the person you marry, but, from my point of view, I know that if I can get you to marry me it will be all right. I shan't have anything to complain of. I don't mean you mayn't run away, though I don't feel you will——"

" No—I wouldn't."

" (There you are, then.) But I'm saying, even if you did, it would all be—how can I say it?—it wouldn't be recriminatory, or foul, or maddening, or any of that beastly muck that men have who marry rotten little tarts who leave the slops about and always have dirty finger-nails, and—and—good God, *I* know what I mean."

So did Fanny at that moment. He was thinking of the lovely Catherine, who had jilted her young husband and whose habits were certainly not particular. She strove to sooth him, and clasped the hand which was sawing the air. He held her more closely, and sat with his cheek leaning against hers. They had lighted the

candles, because the September evenings were drawing in, and there was a mellow, rather misty light in the room, and a bright sparkle in the glass candlesticks. Their heads, as they leant back against the wall, were in shadow.

“ You see, if I were married to you, I should know that I could go on with absolute confidence in every direction. I’d never find myself up against a stone wall. Apart from the fact that I’m in love with you. But that’s my point of view. I’m trying to look at it from yours. I feel that you’re absolutely sympathetic to me, and to have that, it’s such a marvellous, incredible sort of repose, relief—it’s like bathing in the most divinely clear water, with no crabs or weeds or anything anywhere. To be with you, Fanny——” He went on in a more personal vein, and she listened in a half-dream ; feeling rather than hearing what he was saying ; till suddenly he raised his tone and she turned her face up to him in surprise.

“ You will observe,” he was saying, “ that we are in close contact.” He stopped, she stared. “ Now, can you honestly say that you feel the least—the very least—dislike to sitting here like this ? ” She could not ; she had never thought of it before, but she lay in his arms as confidingly as if she had been, as he said, in clear water, or in her own bed.

“ And can you, Fanny, ever imagine yourself bearing to sit like this with someone who wasn’t peculiarly your sort ? ” It was true. Wasn’t she always subconsciously criticising men, shrinking from their snorts, their creaks, their smells, their accents—always privately feeling, “ I’m sure he’s kind and nice, and some people could, but I couldn’t, ever ” ? But she had always, now she remembered it, liked the contact of Anthony ;

grubby and dishevelled though he often was, it had never mattered to her.

"Don't you admit," he was saying, "that that's something significant?"

She couldn't tell. Perhaps it was ; it might mean something or nothing.

He was leaning right over her, so that his face looked enormous and compelling.

"Fanny," he said, "I *know* it would be right. There has always been this peculiar feeling that we understand, that we fit in in some way. It's not that you ever belonged to my group of friends. You're not like my friends ; you're like me. You are ; you are happy, or contented, or something, when you're with me, in a way that you aren't with anybody else."

"Yes."

"And it seems to me that, given the terrific positive element of my wanting to have you, your acquiescing element, considering, in a way, how complete the acquiescence is, is enough to make a reason for our marrying. I consider that if we were to marry it would be much more rational than half the people that do, when the girls fancy they're in love. You know that thing of someone or other's about two strangers from opposing poles meeting in the torrid zone of love? Well, that's just what we aren't. We aren't strangers."

"No."

"And you'd be happy, not because of any specious influence of torrid zones, but because you were really and truly safe and at home, all of your own free will."

"I might be happy. But would you?"

"Oh, good God ! I—really !"

"Yes, you think so, because you love me enough to



want to marry me, and you think our being so—like this with each other is enough reason to make up for my not more than liking you. But suppose I were happy for the wrong reasons? Suppose I were to marry you just because I like your—social position? Your family?”

“You wouldn’t marry me for that unless I were enough like my family to be included in the liking, would you?”

It was true; she didn’t know how to answer.

“You’re no good at all at putting up with the people you don’t like, Fanny.”

“How can you? I always try to——”

“You *try* to, but I’ve seen you at it, and——”

“I’m sure I never let people see that I don’t care about them.”

“Not the people, perhaps; but I see it. I’m much cleverer than you think I am, my girl.”

“Oh, no, darling, I’ve always thought——”

“Oh, this is lovely!” cried Anthony in ecstasy. He began kissing her so rapturously that she became frightened; he stopped at once, and said seriously:

“I have a feeling that you’re hanging back on my account rather than yours, aren’t you?”

No apology for this assumption, nothing to qualify the truth of it. It lay before her as indisputably real as the furniture in the room, the fact that they were sitting together. An extraordinary limpidness of perception shone round them both in the silence. In that moment they could have seen each other’s minds except for the slight covering of their bodies.

He seemed, she thought, to know everything without being able actually to put a name to it. He was so near the truth; did it matter whether she told him or

not? It would cost her so much, so much that she almost thought she would give him up rather—and would it make so very much difference to him? He was continuing:

“It’s true, isn’t it?”

“Yes—mostly.”

He began to make love to her again, assuring her, assuring her that he asked nothing except just to be with her, to live with her. And, while his voice went on above her head, there rose before her how much she could do for him. She knew quite well what he meant when he implored just to be with her. She knew that he saw she could do something for him which would help him to be himself; she understood—better than he did, perhaps, since at the moment his view was obscured by the fact of his wanting her just for herself—how valuable she would be to him. If it were true that she would be marrying him, not for what he was, but for the atmosphere of reflected happiness in which he moved, wasn’t it equally true that he was really marrying her, not for herself, but for what she could create? Someone to surround him with the grace and comfort and amusement and tenderness that he wanted, but could never obtain? She felt a pang at the thought of leaving him, so gifted and unhappy, so feeble and so young, walking about by himself, joining in parties where he was exhausted and laughed at, adoring sweetness and light, and having to live in squalor because he was too weak, although he had friends and relations and brains and money, to struggle out of it. Was there really, from his point of view, any urgent reason for her to hesitate? Why was it wrong? Wasn’t she getting herself lost in a maze about nothing? And if she were to be valuable to him, she must never put a name to

what had happened ; he knew the essentials, and it made no difference. But if he knew—the name—it would give a shock to the whole affair—he would not give her up, she felt sure, but he might be unhappy, uneasy. He was saying :

“ Shall I mention it to James and so forth ? ”

“ Oh, no, no ! ” she cried, starting up. Nothing was settled—what had she been thinking of ? It was highly doubtful whether she could ever—there was so much to think of and imagine. Not knowing that some members, at least, of the family would be only too happy to hear of her engagement, she felt in that instant that they would all take the same view as one. For there was no doubt of it ; it would be an injury to that ; it wasn't for Anthony's sake, after all, it was for her own. It was because of Roger that this would be—what was it Emma had once said about something ? Not only immoral, but disgusting. She shuddered, but Anthony, observing how chill the evenings were getting, lit her gas-fire and reluctantly prepared to go. In spite of her refusal to have anything said (to which he didn't mean to pay any attention), he had never felt so secure of his wishes. He had persuaded her to let him paint her over the week-ends, when she had time to sit. That meant she would be coming to the family house, because James's arrangements on his behalf had so far only reached the stage of borrowing the attic of his brother's house for a studio for Anthony, while he allowed him the top story of his own to live in. So, felt Anthony, there was no immediate hurry ; he was pledged to see a great deal of her for some weeks yet ; an entrancing prospect stretched before him, undefined but radiant. He said good night hastily and ran off. She was surprised at the rapidity of his

disappearance, but she turned back to think of very different affairs.

\* \* \*

Athene was convalescing at home, much better but still languid ; Anthony, who had appointed Sunday to go on with the painting, conducted Fanny up the stairs at about half-past eleven in the morning, and paused outside the drawing-room door.

“ You may as well come in and see Athene, mayn’t you ? ” he said, raising his eyebrows with the rather cross expression he had when he was nervous.

“ Well, I—if she’s expecting me,” said Fanny. She was terrified that they might think that these sittings meant she would be about at all hours. He opened the door and she walked in, turning round to wait for him, but he had shut the door on her. Athene was sitting by a wood-fire, wearing a coffee-coloured little woollen jacket, so immaculate and fluffy that it seemed to have been created that moment. She smiled pleasantly, and said, “ *How* do you do ? ”

“ I hope you’re better,” said Fanny.

“ *Much*. I still feel a little—lost—when I try to walk anywhere——”

“ Yes, I’m sure you must.”

“ Otherwise I am perfectly restored.”

“ I am so glad.”

While Miss Simon looked into the fire, Fanny gazed round the room to avoid appearing embarrassed. She had fixed her eyes on one of those astonishing clocks which radiate out into a hundred gilt beams of irregular length like a firework or a chrysanthemum, and which shone on the wall with its face of sapphire blue enamel with gold figures. She was recalled by Miss Simon’s

saying in that amused and soothing tone that she knew so well :

“ Well, I hear that there is some very exciting news.”

She answered hastily, “ I don’t—I don’t really know yet whether there is or not.”

“ No,” said Miss Simon sympathetically ; she went on chafing the hands clasped round her knee. She lifted her head after a pause, and said :

“ Do your parents know Anthony ? ”

“ I haven’t any. My mother died when I was little, and my father twelve years ago. I have a stepmother.”

“ A stepmother ! And is she agreeable ? ”

“ Yes, she is, very ; only——”

“ You don’t live with her.”

“ No. She’s always been very nice and kind, and I like going to see her. But we aren’t the same kind.”

“ What does she do ? ”

“ Well, she lives in the country, and does gardening.”

“ Gardening ladies *are* sometimes rather difficult,” admitted Miss Simon cautiously. “ They always want to show one what has been put in.” She went on with her competent, rapid examination.

“ And how did you get to know Miss Corder ? ”

“ My stepmother’s sister was at college with her, and told us about her. My stepmother thought it would be nice for me, as I didn’t seem to find anything to do in the neighbourhood.”

“ Yes. You had to earn a living ? ”

“ Not exactly. I could have stayed at home, but I haven’t very much. About one hundred and twenty pounds a year.”

“ And you haven’t any brothers and sisters ? ”

“ No.”

“ Oh, that must be very solitary.”

"I usen't to mind ; but lately I've thought it must be very nice to have them."

"Yes, they are a great comfort. I don't know what I should do without all of mine. You remember your father, of course ? "

"Yes, I do, only not for very long stretches. I remember little things about him more."

"Used he to take an interest in you ? "

"Yes ; he used to cut out all the prints and pictures that struck him as elegant and give them to me, and tell me heaps of stories about Dr. Johnson. And he used to read me pieces out of the Pastorals and other things I've never been able to identify—he thought it would prevent my getting hold of what he called 'female stuff.' "

Miss Simon positively stared.

"Really ? " she said at last. "That showed a great deal of judgment and common sense." She continued her alarming gaze. "And what else did he do for you ? "

"I don't remember, I'm afraid. But I remember, when nurses and people used to hand me over to him and say, 'She's been very good,' thinking he'd be pleased, you know, he used to say 'Oh ? ' in a vacant sort of way, and one day I said, 'Am I good ? ' And he said, 'I don't know,' and we both laughed like anything, though I didn't really know why."

Miss Simon gave her delightful amused gasp. "How very nice," she said. "And did he want you to go to college, or anything of the kind ? Did he make plans for your education ? "

"I don't know."

"No. You went to school ? "

"Yes, I went to a high school, and then I stayed at



home, and then I went to Italy for a little with some of my friends."

"Yes. I see. You mentioned this affair to your stepmother?"

"No, I don't really know whether there is anything to mention."

There was a silence while Miss Simon studied the fire. In the deadly stillness Fanny was drawn swiftly to wondering how much she knew. It was impossible to tell. It was very probable, in the circumstances, she did; but could anyone treat a brother's mistress with such an exquisite mingling of composure and levity, indifference and politeness and even kindness, as she had shown all along? Perhaps she could. Gazing at the averted head with its wonderful modelling that stood out with more clarity than ever under the attenuated flesh of middle age, the firmness of the finely proportioned features and wide, thin mouth, and the utter airiness, elusiveness, and surprising grace over the whole, she felt she must know everything and be capable of anything. A sharp impulse suddenly to tell her everything, to admit she already knew and to make her a present, in utter subjection, of any detail she had not already, almost overmastered her. But she was withheld by the consideration that possibly, very probably, Miss Simon would prefer the subject to be avoided in any case—not to discuss her brother's private affairs with someone who was to her an outsider. The silence was lengthening and becoming painful. So she began to say:

"The difficult thing is——"

Miss Simon looked up with an encouraging smile; and it was now Fanny's turn to look into the fire.

"The difficulty is, one is delighted to see a person,

and adores to be with them, and is happy in every possible way, perhaps ; but suppose one is shut up with them altogether, would it be the same ? ”

“ I don’t know, I’m sure. Impossibly difficult to tell, I should think.”

Fanny came and perched on the fender, and said with perfect candour :

“ Now it is never oppressive, because one can always tell the person to stop. But afterwards, when you can’t, I think it must be so frightening.”

Miss Simon considered. “ Well,” she said at last, giving pause for a suppressed smile, “ I believe it’s usually the married ladies who are applied to for information on these points, but one always understands that that sort of thing arranges itself—quite nicely—afterwards.”

They were both laughing at this evoking of that slightly ludicrous object, the Married Lady, when Deborah came in with a glass of hot milk ; Athene curled her fingers round it gratefully, and Fanny, getting up to go, said wonderingly :

“ Can you really drink hot milk ? ”

“ Certainly. Why shouldn’t I be able to drink it ? ”

“ I can’t imagine how you can.”

“ I don’t think your imagination is really as defective as all that, is it ? ” said Athene laughing.

Deborah greeted her cordially, and told her not to let Anthony make her sit too long. She went upstairs in a strange condition of calm and lively pleasure ; Athene, meanwhile, recounted to her sister the gist of the conversation.

“ And so you have been giving her information about the Facts of Life, have you ? ” said Deborah. She hugged herself.

"Well," said Athene, "not the Facts of Life exactly, I think. Merely their—aspect after marriage."

"Shall I give her a little talk? I'm always ready——"

"You shall do nothing of the kind. Besides, you might find it completely unnecessary."

"I wonder,"

"But, seriously, I hope Anthony isn't harassing her unduly. She looks very pale."

"Yes, I thought so."

"It isn't as if she were living at home; she's absolutely at his mercy unless she shuts the door in his face."

"Yes, she isn't having much of an opportunity to step back and view things with an impartial eye."

Athene laughed. "Well, I suppose an impartial eye is rather much to ask for in these affairs; but all the same——" Neither needed to remind the other of what sort of a young man Anthony was.

They both agreed that for her to be shut up at the top of the house in complete isolation with him was what, for her sake, they ought not to allow. And when the two came downstairs to lunch, Deborah cornered him in the bathroom and suggested very simply and tactfully the propriety of allowing visitors in the studio now and again.

"Well, of course," said Anthony, drying his hands, "I don't mind. You and Athene are very welcome to come up whenever you like. Only as for my hounding her, you must see, surely, that I've got to. It's a stiff bit of work, I can tell you, and it's no good thinking about the other person's feelings, or you may as well give up at once. It's all right so far. The end is in sight, I mean, only it's no good asking me to relax my grip just now. You must see that." He then noticed Athene's mocking face leaning over the bath.

"Oh," he said, "won't you——"

"It's all right. I can use the bath taps."

"Well, anyway," he said to Deborah, "come up, of course, when you want to." He went down to wait in the dining-room with Fanny, where they amused themselves with eating cheese biscuits out of the silver dish and hoping that their thefts would not be noticed.

After lunch they retired upstairs again, and renewed the sitting.

The arrangement suited both of them ; it gave Fanny time to think and to feel, and to Anthony it gave several hours in which this object—round which all his conscious desires and interests were settled, so that it received a faintly supernatural lustre—was entirely guided by the motions of his brain ; the elusive creature, instead of floating off before him as it perpetually seemed to do at other times, was here anchored down in front of him. It was still instinct with its own independent life (the slightly weary, petulant shifting of a shoulder or a frill at his request, the unreclaimable, far expression of the eyes) ; it was secured by filaments so slender that nothing of its own individual character was crushed, but it remained there as a buoy, with its intact and gleaming shape, bobs up and down on the water, fastened invisibly, but always at straining-point to carry itself off and lose itself among the different waves.

She was not only subservient to his desire of making her sit to him, but she was controlled by all the myriad impressions of his past and present existence which impelled his brain, as he looked at her, to desire her hand raised, or her hair pushed back, or her cheek exposed to the white light slipping in at the window. To control this thing, to hold it, yet without brushing

the bloom from its wings, was so intensely, so subtly delicious, so deeply, fully satisfying to have in everyday life to adorn it, and to make the background of living something to rush back into with ecstasy, instead of a monotony to enhance the extravagant interludes.

A light knock high up on the door startled them both ; Fanny, perched on the arm of a sofa, with her hands in her lap, was exploring the pleasures that her probable future held for her. Her mind was exquisitely stimulated and caressed by the simple intimacy of a morning in the house. She was busy testing, in the strictest privacy of thought, the almost voluptuous degree of pleasure words, looks, the pattern of the table-linen gave her, and conscious at the same time of Anthony's intent, undeviating stare. He had laid down his brush and was gazing at her, until the serenity in which she had been able to enjoy the thrilling of her nerves was dissolved away, and she was once more tossed helplessly in vast perplexity and distress. He had asked her to wear a limp white muslin dress from the already relinquished summer wardrobe, with finely pleated frills that crossed and recrossed the skirt and edged the long plain sleeves. As she sat before him in the pearl-shadowed corner, a frill lying over each wrist and her childish black head tied up with coral-coloured ribbon, he flattered himself that he had an arrangement that could not be bettered ; the exhilaration he felt in her presence, and the satisfactory condition of his digestion, which during the last few days had taken a surprising turn for the better, and the consistency of his paint, which was perfect, combined to put him into a condition relaxed yet lively, in which he felt that every atom of his weight was behind every leisurely touch.

He looked at her again ; her face, between the warm grey shade and the light of the window, seemed to gather into itself the tints of mother-of-pearl. He noticed that her lips, one resting softly on the other, were light red and slightly shining. And he thought to himself, " This was not for moment, for adventures ; this was for always. To try to understand, to seize and lose and seize again."

She started and almost jumped off her seat as Athene stepped lightly into the room.

Miss Simon did not hang over the picture, which she saw at a glance was going to be very difficult to understand ; she merely said :

" Well, do you progress ? " and sat down by a little walnut writing-bureau ; here she remained with her legs crossed, seeming to regard the carpet. Fanny, stealing a furtive glance along her cheek, wondered why it was that Ivan's description was so apt—who had said, seeing her momentarily at an upper window, " She would look very good in the hunting-field, brandishing one of those great whips about." Why was it that Athene, who never shouted, or threw the plates about, or slammed doors, or hit children, should yet, sitting so quietly, so abstractedly, recall such a definition to mind ? Why was it that they were so different from the circle in which they moved, in which they were most at home, where there were people equally cultivated, equally informed, equally gifted ? Was not part of their unearthly attraction the austere and thrilling charm of the most enlightened virtue ? What did it matter that they belonged to a circle lax in conventional morality and utterly sceptical of the accepted faiths ? Whatever they did, they still impressed the mind with the overpowering conviction that essentially they



pursued the plain but hazardous path of simple rectitude. It was this that gave them that extraordinary air of severity and mockery, of sensitiveness and inaccessibility. Though they were among the most distinguished members of fashionable intellectual society, and originated the greater number of mannerisms and modes, they yet presented a plainness and a starkness in their delicacy and their grace that their imitators could not imitate.

But Anthony, who imagined that Athene had toiled up the flights of stairs in order to dissipate by her presence any little uneasiness that Fanny might feel at being shut up so long alone with him, now expected her to enter into the party, and either to come and look at his painting, which he was quite prepared to explain, or to say something light and general to make everybody feel at home. To walk into the room and merely subside was not what he required of her. He addressed a remark to her, and she looked up with as much surprise and interrogation as if he had roused her up at midnight.

But Fanny was enchanted, released. Athene's mere presence had made her once more a responsible being ; no longer she had sensation of being blinded, overpowered. She slipped off the sofa ; she wanted to run away and exercise her newly restored powers of independent thought.

"Are you tired?" said Anthony. She said she was, though she was really only lazy and disinclined to go on sitting.

"Is one allowed to look?" she heard Athene saying in a low purring tone, as she pulled the ribbon off her hair and ran out of the room.

Yes, she thought, leaning over the banisters, that was

the secret of it all ; Athene had only to come into the room and sit down, without saying anything, and people were rescued from their degrading folly and confusion, restored to peace and sense. "At least, I know now," she thought, "whatever I do, it may be wrong and silly, but at least it will be the outcome of my own will—I shall be acting as a responsible, if not a rational, creature." They do their best ; the mistakes are all made by the weakness of the other people, she thought, and she settled down to keeping her eyes open and her senses receptive for the next few days, so that she could really make the decision, rather than be pushed into it ; for she thought it could not be put off very much longer.

It was extraordinarily soothing to be loved. When she felt Anthony's eye on her directly she entered a room, and noticed how unconsciously he betrayed that he was always so conscious of her presence, she felt a grateful warmth, and a peculiar sense of something wrong, a mistake somewhere. It was not she that was to be loved ; love meant something that she felt, not that was felt for her. That someone should be angling and plotting for her spare minutes, should only limit his time with her by the fear that she would be tired or bored or put out—that she should be valued, in fact—seemed extraordinary, and something that she could never be quite used to. It gave a strange wildness and gentleness to her behaviour which had always possessed a certain subdued animation ; and it drove Anthony nearly frantic with bewilderment and desire. In her amazement at his admiration, she never thought that while she found it difficult to get on with his relations because they never saw anything in her but a possessed creature, desperate and clogged and helpless, he, to

whom she was, by comparison, indifferent, saw her real self in all its unrestricted movements.

The position in which she found herself was that of wanting to slip into an existence with Anthony ; to find pleasure in doing the things she could do for him, and, above all, to yield herself to the warmth and security, the support of his love ; more and more, she was beginning to realise, she wanted that ; she wanted the comfort of being loved by the only man, except one, whom she could ever allow to be intimate with her. And the only reason, she thought, that restrained her, was that it would not be right by him, when he himself knew perfectly that she was his best chance of happiness, and never ceased impressing her with the fact—and when, so far from being repudiated by his relations, she was conscious that there was a strong current in the family of approbation and eagerness. It was happiness, or something so very much like it. She said she would marry him, if he was sure he wanted her.

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Ivan Archer was seriously disturbed. He rang Anthony up on the telephone and said he had heard he was going to be married. Anthony said yes, he was, and waited for the customary congratulations before hanging up the receiver and rushing off to consult a house-agent. All that was transmitted to his ear, however, was a single " Oh."

" Well, yes," said Anthony hastily. " You must come and see us when we're settled."

" Well, I should like to see you before then," said Ivan. " Suppose I come round this morning ? "

Anthony was annoyed ; however, he said he could come at half-past twelve if that was any use, and rang

off. He was sitting in James's room, listening to James's remarks about situation and not having too many stairs, and making calculations on the back of an envelope, and had just decided, it being then a quarter to eleven, to set off to the agent's, when a taxi drove up and Ivan, complete with raglan overcoat and mahogany walking-stick, was shown in.

Anthony said resignedly that he might as well come with him to the house-agent's, so they got into the taxi together.

"Well," said Ivan. "(Here, where's he going? I want to stop at Fortnum & Mason first, if you don't mind.) Well, you seem to have let yourself in for it."

"I don't know what you mean by that," said Anthony tartly. "You aren't going to spring all the music-hall jokes on me about mothers-in-law and triplets, are you?" He looked sideways to see if Ivan were offended, but he was merely very earnest and uncomfortable.

"It's not that," he said. "Well, one doesn't know how to put it exactly."

"Put it anyway you like if you feel you have to."

"It's just that it's a very risky thing, you see, to do what you're doing."

"What the hell do you mean?"

"Well, my view is—— Oh, here we are. One minute." Ivan dived out of the taxi and reappeared with an invalid hamper, which he put under the seat. One of his models was ill. Anthony, propped up in the corner in the bluish light of the taxi, was eyeing him with the cold and deadly air of an asp. He forced himself to say with energy :

"I don't think this is the sort of thing you want to be doing."

"You don't?"

"Now look here, Anthony," said Ivan, suddenly losing his temper. "I don't belong to your *intelligentsia* gang, and all this snubbing and leg-pulling that goes on simply won't do with me. I'm doing my best to put something to you, and if you knew what it was you'd put up with my being tactless and boorish and loud-voiced, simply to get hold of it."

"Very well," said Anthony quietly, looking very elegant and endearing as he sat with his hands lightly clasped round his stick.

"My point is," said Ivan, "that once a girl has been in love with somebody else——"

"You know Fanny has?"

"Well, it's common property, isn't it? Mind you," he added hastily, "I don't know anything about her personally." He didn't want Anthony to suppose that the affair had been anything to do with him; considering his reputation, it was perhaps a risky subject to have entered on. "It's well known," he continued, "that Fanny and I have always got on, only I was never in her confidence, so I don't know the details of this affair, only it's quite obvious there was one——"

"Well, and suppose I know all that?"

"Well, you don't want to marry a dead creature, do you? Once a girl like Fanny has had a real affair with someone, she's used up, worn out. To marry one of them is the most frightfully decadent sort of thing a fellow can do. They're just carrion, you see."

Anthony was young enough to be very angry at this language. His hand trembled as he put it on the handle.

"Well," he said, "thanks for the lift. I'll get out here."

"I'm sorry you're angry. If only you'd take it sensibly we could have a very interesting talk. You don't know how useful you might find it."

Anthony replied, "I expect we could, but I'm busy." He was afraid that perhaps he was being rather unintelligent, so he said :

"Well, anyhow, we might lunch or something next week, but I've got a lot to do just at present."

"All right. Ring me up when you're free."

"I will."

Anthony got out into Conduit Street and Ivan drove back to a Jewish artist who lived in Fitzroy Street ; a wild little man who was painting a set of gigantic murals illustrating the Day of Judgment, and who refreshed himself in between his labours with cocoa which he boiled on a spirit stove. Ivan told him what a fool Anthony was, and Levin told him not to worry, and offered him a glass of cocoa.

Ivan sat with the glass balanced on his knee and stirred it with the handle of a paintbrush.

"Well," he said gloomily, "that sort of thing upsets you rather." He was privately congratulating himself on the tact with which he had passed over the absence of a spoon, and afterwards related it to his friends. Levin told the same friends how piggish in his habits Ivan was, though so rich, and that he had used a paintbrush handle rather than trouble to ask for a spoon ; so the question of Anthony's marriage was welded into a group of smaller problems.

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James Simon came round, and said, "I suppose this is all right? I feel that something is expected of me, but I really don't know what it is. Do I have to ask



Miss Arne whether she can keep Anthony in the condition to which he has been accustomed ? ”

“ I don’t *think* so,” replied Deborah ; “ I rather imagine that Anthony has blossomed forth into a very masculine and dictatorial creature.”

“ Well, I hope he may,” said James. “ Certainly, it may be just the thing for him to become a family man.” But after a little general conversation he drew her aside and said, “ I must say I can’t quite see why she should want to marry Anthony.”

“ Aren’t you rather unappreciative of your first-born ? ”

“ What I should have said was, I rather suspect I do see. Mayn’t she be doing it out of intellectual snobbery ? ”

“ My dear James, I am ready with the best to admit the honour of being allied to our family, but if one didn’t like Anthony personally, could one do with him in such a very intimate relationship ? The girl isn’t a fool ; quite particular too, I think. I don’t think she would be so immoral, either, as you seem to suggest.”

“ Well, I’m not casting aspersions ; in any case, my dear, we fathers—broadly speaking, it isn’t our business. It’s only that one doesn’t want the boy to get into any sort of arrangement that isn’t going to be satisfactory from his point of view. However, I quite admit I should be the last person to interfere.” She laughed.

“ I should have said myself it was eminently satisfactory from his point of view. There can’t be any doubt about his wanting to marry her.”

“ No.” James was himself puzzled at the bold, fiery, formidable young man that seemed to have risen up out of the ashes of Anthony’s previous ineptitude.

“And, after all, if she can do with it—that’s her affair, isn’t it?”

“Entirely.”

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The business of telling outside people reassured Fanny ; she minded so little, was so very incurious as to how they would take it, that she felt the matter was really becoming a part of her life, and that was the reason she only accorded a perfunctory interest to seeing what effect it made on others.

She had to tell her stepmother ; she and Anthony went down to see Mrs. Arne, who had sold her husband’s large house and lived by herself in a small modern one, with a large garden, now filled with beautiful late autumn flowers, commanding a view across the brown landscape to the Chiltern Hills.

Fanny felt cold and apprehensive as they entered the house ; looking at him impersonally, she saw that he was exactly the last sort of young man of whom Mrs. Arne could be expected to approve ; but Anthony himself, comforted by a bright blooming fire and a perfectly cooked lunch, and a general atmosphere of airy well-being in the house, seemed quite at ease, and so much admired Mrs. Arne’s appearance that their *rapprochement* was complete. Mrs. Arne was indeed very good-looking ; her regular features were made striking by the bright blue colour of her eyes and her grey hair. She was not a woman of sensibility or ideas but she possessed common sense and tact in such a degree that they conferred a kind of vigorous attraction on her, as rare in its way as the subtler charms of more imaginative people. Her brilliant matter-of-factness exhilarated the mind like a strongly marked

rhythm in inferior poetry ; her appeal was obvious and instantaneous, but no more meretricious for that than was that of the beautiful sapphire and diamond rings on her fingers.

"Yes, the air is getting very sharp now," she was saying in response to Anthony's praise of the fire ; "the servants do as they like about everything else in the house, but I really *do* take it upon me to insist that they keep one good fire going." Anthony looked, and thought that if the arrangements of the house really were due to the servants doing as they liked, they must be a very knowing lot.

"And I do *trust*, Fanny," continued Mrs. Arne, "that you are going to get some really sensible warm things. I suppose it's no use asking you to have proper underclothes, though I believe that now one can get those Shetland wool things that are quite as dainty as anything silk ; if you would, I'm sure I would most willingly pay for them."

"Doesn't she wear proper underclothes ? " asked Anthony eagerly.

"So he doesn't know that," thought Mrs. Arne in rapid parenthesis. That was a relief, certainly. She dismissed the idea hastily, but really, nowadays, one never knew where one was with anybody. "Well," she said with a smile, "very pretty, of course, but when it comes to keeping out the cold, I always feel that there's nothing like honest wool."

"So do I," said Anthony earnestly. He was thinking that Fanny would look rather sweet in little woollen vests. He wouldn't object to those at all.

"Another thing I had in mind," Mrs. Arne went on, as she gracefully handed the coffee-cups. "You remember Passingham, Fanny, who used to be with us ? "

"Yes, of course."

"Well, if you and Anthony haven't made any arrangements about servants, I was thinking it might be rather nice for you to have her as a kind of cook-housekeeper."

"What sort of a person was she?" asked Anthony.

"Oh," said Fanny, "she was magnificent. Very upstanding, with reddish hair. She said when she was little if you put a piece of gold in it you couldn't tell the difference."

Mrs. Arne waved a hand impatiently. "She was a most admirable servant, she was actually a house-parlourmaid with us, but she was a very good cook as well. The fact of the matter was, her father was a gentleman. And she was so much affected by what her mother had had to put up with that she always vowed she would never have anything to do with a man, and to the best of my belief she never has had. She is the sort of really old-fashioned servant that thoroughly appreciates what she calls 'good service.' After she left us she went to some people who were *nouveau riche*, you know, and it was gall and wormwood to her! So she left service altogether, and she has quite a little money of her own, and lives near here, but she was telling me only the other day, when I came across her in the town, that she finds it dull to have nothing to do; I'm sure that she would be willing——"

"Yes," said Anthony, crossing his legs, "but we should have to give a person like that a very good salary. I don't know whether we could afford it."

"No, we meant to have a daily woman."

"Well, now," said Mrs. Arne, with a charming, hesitating, and gracious air, "if it could all be arranged, I should like to pay her wages for the first year, as part

of my wedding-present. Then, at any rate, you would be started comfortably," she continued, to drown Anthony's embarrassed protestations. "It would be nice for Fanny to have someone who knows her already, and I'm sure Passingham would make you thoroughly comfortable."

"It really is *too* kind of you——"

"Well, you see, you would be tided over the most difficult time of housekeeping, with someone to have proper meals always going——"

"It sounds perfectly marvellous—but I really don't feel we ought to let you——"

"Oh, I do hope you will," cried Mrs. Arne, in a burst of anxiety that swept away all conventions of social reticence, "and then I should feel that at least there was one person with some sense about the place!"

Anthony burst out laughing, to Fanny's great relief; she was so much accustomed to the managing ways of her stepmother that in being fearful of how they would strike other people she was apt to overlook the factor of Mrs. Arne's personal charm. Anthony, on his side, was astounded to see Fanny, whom he had always regarded as eminently practical and sensible, melting in her stepmother's house into a scatter-brained, improvident little creature, whose practical capacity was considered on a level with his own.

"If she will come," he said, "of course we should be delighted."

"Very well then, we'll consider that settled. It's a great weight off my mind, I assure you." Mrs. Arne's briskness of manner made her rare moments of hesitancy and depreciation so very attractive, that, combined with her goodwill and the charm that a beautiful and elderly woman of the world has over a young

man, she was making a most favourable impression on Anthony. On her part, she recognised something in him that was beyond her experience that commanded her respect. As he lay, festooned, as she said to herself, over his chair, his face reminded her of some Italian painting she thought she had seen somewhere—one of the Medici perhaps—with its pallor and reddish hair and the something indefinable, cold, and fierce in its expression. He was a man of contrasts, she thought ; his beard, which at first sight had struck her as being merely the result of a disinclination to shave, now seemed, in the view she had at that moment of his head, to be as much an integral part of the face as eyes or nose. She was obliged to suspend her disapproval ; and, though he spoke in that rather childish non-committal manner which she supposed was the fashion now, the way he tapped Fanny on the arm when he wanted the matches seemed to show that he was really quite a strong-minded person. So much the better.

“ May we take back some flowers ? ” Fanny was saying.

“ Certainly. You’ll find the flower-scissors in the drawer.” They scampered out on to the lawn, and Mrs. Arne called to them through the window :

“ Nice long stalks, now, and don’t cut the buds off my dahlias.”

The garden was amazing, with its dark earth and single, brilliant flowers. They cut a large armful, pink, yellow, blue, purple, and copper-coloured ; earth and air were so hard and clear, and so poignant with cold and a tang of wood smoke, that their faces as they peered in and out of the tall flowers were almost visionary. They both felt a sudden delicious tenderness for each other.



"This is all extraordinarily interesting," said Anthony, gazing round with one arm round her waist.

"Yes, isn't it? I'll show you everything—only of course it isn't really as interesting as the house where I was born."

"We must see that one day." They wandered about until it was time to hurry off to the station ; when they got into the hall, Mrs. Arne had tied up the flowers with paper and string.

"I am delighted that we have met," she said, with the rather ceremonious and intimate manner with which she was accustomed to mark occasions. Anthony said, "I am awfully pleased to have got to know you. I hope you'll come and see us often." He was smiling at her, and she turned to help him into his coat with the perfectly understood implication on both sides that he was a young man and she a very attractive woman. In the middle of this interesting moment she suddenly exclaimed :

"My dear boy ! Fanny, ask Williams to let me have a clothes brush !"

She brushed Anthony's collar with her own hands, and everyone was embarrassed at the clouds of dust that rose up out of it. Not, however, that this final circumstance detracted from the success of the visit. Anthony had been extremely well pleased, and, as Fanny clung to his arm on the way to the station, she welcomed the conscious expanding in her breast of warm and animated feeling for him that had been aroused by the day's companionship.

"Clever, I should say, decidedly, in his own way," Mrs. Arne was saying as she drew off her gloves at her friend's tea-table, "and quite charming, I suppose, but rather—well, you know, a want of vigour—plain,

ordinary common sense. I should be driven frantic ; however, that's Fanny's affair. She goes her own way and I go mine. If she's happy, that's all I have to say. Naturally, for Evelyn's sake, one wanted just to see that everything was respectable and above-board, and I believe the family is extremely—you know, good. Yes, distinguished, but really well bred, you know ; quite the thing. However, I've done all I can now ; the sooner she marries him the better. She would never have settled down with the sort of person you or I would have thought suitable ; so she must just please herself and hope for the best. Anyhow, I'm glad that it's settled she shall have Passingham. That makes me feel my responsibilities are really over."

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In the meantime, Rosemary had left the office and married George—in pale blue georgette and Madonna lilies—and settled in Streatham. Fanny received a letter from her a few months afterwards begging her to go out and pay her a visit, and adding that, as there was no one she really liked as yet among the people she had got to know, she found herself rather lonely. Poor girl, thought Fanny, she has discovered that one wants more in marriage than merely being married ; she respected Rosemary for this rather unexpected discontent, and at the same time was very much concerned and sorry. So, in the guilelessness of her heart, she wrote a little note, promising a visit very soon, and adding, " I am so sorry that you feel lonely, but I expect that presently you will have a baby——" She paused a moment. Yes, there could be no reason for not saying that ; indeed, from what she had seen of George, quite the contrary ; she hurriedly went on, " And then that

will be so endlessly charming that you'll never have another dull minute, and be as happy as the day is long." Which was silly, but, knowing the aim and ambition of Rosemary's life had always been a baby, she administered the consolation which she sincerely thought the most useful and appropriate. This, however, is not the way in which brides should ever be addressed ; remarks which seem to suggest that their position is anything but one of envy and admiration to the rest of the world, and the spinster population in particular, are regarded as most offensive impertinence, and Fanny carefully retained this knowledge against further mistakes ; for she received by the next post a sheet of lined white paper enclosed in an orange vellum envelope saying that if Fanny hadn't been such a close friend Rosemary should really have thought it very strange indeed, and she didn't know *where* she could have got the idea *from*. But she was perfectly happy and contented ; it simply was that, with George being out all day except Saturday and Sunday, she merely wanted to see a few people now and again that she could really *talk to*, and so far she hadn't come across anyone in the road who seemed to be of her level. Fanny was distressed at her stupidity in immediately attributing to another person what her own feelings would have been in their circumstances ; she had been so over-ready to understand that if one were married to George—however, it didn't do to dwell upon that ; everyone had different ideas, and a very good thing too. Anxious to atone for her mistake by being very much struck with all the prettiness and comfort in which she was sure she would find Rosemary ensconced, she set off to Streatham that afternoon, and found Rosemary pouring out for two callers.

The sitting-room had furniture covered with bright green morocco and a rosy flowered carpet ; the white marble mantelpiece was ornamented with green candles—never lit, but crowned with lilac and gold paper shades—and two little white china figures which Rosemary admired because she said they looked so eighteenth century, by which she meant the novelist's period of ruffles, white wigs, and jewelled rapiers. The windows had green and rosy curtains ; and their lower panes were covered with pink net, which seemed to make the whole air flushed. A dear little fire sparkling in the grate added to the sense of warmth and pinkness. Rosemary herself, very pretty and slightly over-rouged, in a new cherry-coloured cashmere dress and new uncracked patent leather slippers, was pouring out tea from the bright silver teapot. She exhaled the hot, sweet scent of Ashes of Roses which Fanny had hitherto always disliked extremely, but now she thought, "I see now the surroundings which it is meant to complete—now I shall always half like it." The other callers—a middle-aged lady with a rather severe red face and china blue eyes, and her daughter, who saw at once that Fanny was what she called "essentric," if not positively "stuck up"—were being very cordial and attentive to the hostess, and keeping a wary eye cocked on this unexpected-looking friend. Fanny said wholeheartedly what a cosy room it was, and that the little figures were lovely. Rosemary poured her out a cup of tea, and was going to add some Ideal milk out of the cream jug. But Fanny felt that with the pink curtains it would be too much, and hastily stopped her.

"Don't you like it?" said Rosemary. "I use it instead of cream ; it's so much richer. I love it." So Fanny said that she took her tea without anything.

"You always used to take milk at the office," said Rosemary, a little sharply.

"Yes," said Fanny, "but just lately I've given it up." She felt that any lie was better than to seem to cast the least slur on the housekeeping arrangements. After this slight jar she joined nervously but eagerly in the conversation which centred round Southwold.

"I have been there," she said shyly. "There is a most beautiful old church, isn't there?"

The elder lady looked at her and replied :

"I haven't been into it. My cousin is the Congregational minister there."

"Oh, really," said Fanny. "Yes, yes, of course." She dropped the spoon out of her saucer and blushed crimson.

The conversation seemed to stick a little after that, and soon, the prescribed limit of afternoon calls having been reached, the ladies got up and took their departure. When they were safely away, Rosemary came back and sat down beside her ; she was delighted to see Fanny, and could now enjoy a really intimate showing off of the house. Fanny, conscious of George's manly but slightly distressing features gazing at her from a silver frame on the mantelpiece, was assailed with the icy foreboding that, charming as Rosemary was at present, she was going, not to mollify the characteristics of George, but to assimilate them. At present a few pictures transplanted from her virgin bedroom, prints from the *Delineator* and from *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, framed in gold binding, hung round the walls, but these were presently to be displaced by some handsome sketches done by George's aunt, who was having half a dozen framed for them as a wedding-present. "They really are most artistic," said Rosemary,

"fortunately. Otherwise it might have been rather awkward."

"Yes, I should think so, but I hope you will keep these somewhere, all the same," said Fanny.

When they were upstairs in the bedroom—Rosemary's especial pride—filled with lilac upholstery, white enamel, and pink silk cushions, and they had admired separately all the powder-bowls and scent-sprays and the new Celanese underwear and the trousseau dresses and an opera cloak of crimson velvet and a sealskin coat, and peeped with a sense of awe into the chest where George's piles of woollen underwear were reposing, they leaned against the window-sill and agreed that anyone merely coming up the road could see from the windows how much nicer Rosemary's house was than anybody else's in the row.

"*I am* so happy," said Rosemary. "I feel, you know, that this is really *life*. And all the things that happened to me before were just nothing at all. I feel, if you don't mind my saying so, that you don't know what it is either."

There was a pause.

"I expect it means something different for everybody."

"It may do," said Rosemary. "Did I show you my dance-frock?" She went across and took the buttercup yellow taffeta out of its box.

"It got torn the other night," she explained, fingering a little rent in the skirt. "We went to such a nice dance; there was an awfully nice man there—a business friend of George's; extraordinarily handsome. I was quite thrilled when he danced with me. I told George I was half in love with him, and that it was a pity *he* didn't look like that."



There was a moment's silence.

"You——" said Fanny weakly. "You—what?"

Rosemary laughed airily. "Oh, I always tell George all my reactions," she said.

"But aren't you afraid of his remembering that sort of thing—later?"

Rosemary looked displeased, and she could say no more, but she was shocked by this sudden revelation of how very thinly disguised in a love of George was the idea of a house and a baby. Deep feelings, perhaps, one did not expect, but in Fanny's present state of mind such a state of things was painfully shocking; she made a valiant effort to grasp her common sense, and to admit that in reality it was all quite normal, quite satisfactory, quite——

"Well, tell me something about yourself," interrupted Rosemary a little abruptly. She had been annoyed by the silence; she led the way to the two cretonne-covered easy-chairs that stood at the foot of the bed, and they sat down.

"The fact is," said Fanny, grasping a handsome braid trimming, "I wanted to. I'm engaged to be married."

"What! Really!" exclaimed Rosemary, delighted but incredulous. "My dear! Who to? Do I know them?" Fanny explained who to as well as she could, and reminded her that she had probably seen his aunt at Miss Corder's office.

"Oh," said Rosemary, in the rather flat tone with which she expressed lack of interest and disapproval. "And what's he like?"

Fanny attempted a sketch of her lover's person and endowments, but she felt instinctively that she was making poor work of it, and that the chief feeling that

she was arousing in Rosemary's bosom was one almost of resentment that Anthony should be very much unlike George in every particular. "Well, I can hardly believe it," she said at last; "it seems so funny. I don't suppose he's the sort of man I should ever have married, but, then, I don't suppose you would ever have cared for George."

Fanny mumbled something conciliatory.

"Is he artistic?" enquired Rosemary.

Fanny looked blank. "I don't know," she said; she added as an afterthought, "He paints."

"And a beard, you say?" continued Rosemary. "Fancy! I don't think I've ever seen a *young* man with a beard. You must bring him out to see us."

"I'd like to, if he's free," said Fanny.

"And *you'll* come again, anyhow, won't you?" said Rosemary, with a renewal of cordiality, as they stood on the front door step.

"Yes, I will indeed," replied Fanny with much sincerity. But as she went down Cricklade Avenue with a rather chill evening wind blowing in her face and a flaring pale sunset reflected in the puddles, she shivered as she thought, "How could anyone who ever fancied themselves in love want the person's face to be different? One *might*, perhaps, wish them not to wear such frightful hats, but as for wanting the eyes and cheeks to be different, *whatever* they were like——" She became submerged in contemplation of that surprising, adored face, seeing it so clearly that she felt she was dying, standing on the pavement of Streatham High Road, and waiting for the tram; against the background of the sharp breeze, and the bright, pale splashes of light, and the metallic clinking of the trams,

it seemed to bow down over her, dark and intense and still.

"I daresay," said Rosemary to George that evening, "that she is as fond of him as it's *in* her to be, but I don't think it *is* in Fanny to be *really* in love with anybody. She's too much wrapped up in herself."

"Some girls are like that," said George wisely.

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It was rather like steering a boat, Fanny felt, sometimes through rough water that nearly overturned one, and sometimes into stretches of calm through which one slid with an exhilarating motion.

She had resigned her post in Miss Corder's office, because the marriage was approaching and she found she had so many odd things to do. Miss Corder had been most gracious and cordial, and had suggested her going away for a short time. Marriage was an arduous business, said Miss Corder, and it was a pity to enter on it in poor health. Fanny hastened to say that she was very well, and had enjoyed her work in the office, and hoped Miss Corder would come and see them when they were married. She said this with a sincerity that could not fail to be agreeable, but Miss Corder, with the irritating immovability of alert old ladies, continued to urge the claims of Torquay, and finally waved good-bye over the desk as if Fanny were already in the train for it.

She sat now in her room, which she was soon to give up, sewing rather happily. Anthony was taking a final look over a house in Hampstead Square which he had decided they were to have, and she was enjoying a lazy afternoon. She was making a few underclothes, not because she needed or could afford many new ones,

but because it was pleasant to have something of the sort on hand at present.

Anthony's ardour, and his satisfaction, plainly shown in his new air of importance and his almost autocratic ways, had quieted her mind into a warm and tranquil condition of happiness. As she now sat by herself in the quiet room, she began to think :

"It is so strange ; the reason most people would think it wicked for me to be marrying him is because when I was with Roger he took away my virginity. But that's not it really ; I hardly remember that except waking up and saying 'Will it hurt?' and the way he said 'No.' I can't remember clearly sleeping with him, because the fact of being so close to him, knowing that he was there and not going away, was such repose that I used to go right off to sleep ; I couldn't help it ; I only remember the nights as long, perfect sleep.

"The things I remember that make it wrong aren't those ; they are things like the drive we had that afternoon. I sat by him and held his arm in both my hands ; I could just see his face reflected in the glass of the windows in front of us. We said nothing the whole time, except that once he looked down and said, 'You're like a tendril.' We just drove on in silence. It is that, and what I felt when I looked out of the window and saw him walking on the path before breakfast, that makes this wrong—things that nobody else would think had anything to do with it. If I told someone that my having slept with him was nothing compared with my having gone for a drive with him and looked at him out of a window, they would think me an idiot. But I know that that was what really mattered, and that that is why I am wicked. But to whom ? I can't grasp it. I don't know."

Certainly when Anthony came in that evening it didn't seem that she could be guilty of anything towards him. As she lay in his arms, the tender affection she felt for him was suffused by a peculiar radiance, secret and tremulous ; it sprang from the knowledge that, as she lay with her head pressed to his shoulder, she could ask him where Roger was, and he would tell her. She kept her lips tightly closed ; it was enough to feel this inward, blind delight, that filled her as the sky slowly smiles before the moon has risen above the horizon. The thought of how Roger would take the news of her wedding had not as yet more than brushed her mind. The calm she was now enjoying was too great a relief for her thoughts to remain entirely active, and she had, in her long periods of resignation and despair, almost ceased to think of herself as one whose doings could, in absence, affect him. Naturally, she was mistaken ; Roger had not happened to hear the engagement spoken of as a *fait accompli* in his family ; he spent so many week-ends away that when he was at home there were always various and particular things to talk about, among which Anthony's concerns took a secondary place now that the matter was finally settled. Athene never mentioned the subject to him, and Deborah and Henry took it for granted that he knew about it.

One morning, at work in his room on the other side of the hall, he found himself distracted by a repeated shrilling, as Athene was lying in bed upstairs and refusing to answer the telephone ; finally, he came out into the hall and asked the maid what was wanted, and was told that a gentleman said Miss Simon had promised to speak to him between nine and half-past, and that he kept on ringing, although he had been told

she wasn't down yet. Ten minutes later, at the fifth piercing interruption, Roger ran upstairs, and, tapping at Athene's door, entered the bedroom.

"My dear," he murmured, leaning over the pillow.

Miss Simon opened one eye.

"Couldn't you slip on something and come down to speak to this fellow just for a moment?"

Miss Simon shut the eye up again.

"I have no wish to be rude to anyone," said Roger with desperate calmness, "but if he rings up again and I am left to answer the telephone——" He broke off and leant over her again, to see if there were any signs of her repenting; but she was merely laughing into the bedclothes.

"Well, really," he exclaimed in a rage, "this is *too* much!" He rushed out of the room and slammed the door. Returning hastily to his study to settle down once more, he was confronted by the apparition of Anthony, who rose up out of an easy-chair and, coming up to him, said:

"I came to tell you about my engagement."

Roger was speechless. "Well," he said at last, "that was very nice of you. Won't you sit down?"

Anthony sat down again rather nervously. He thought perhaps he had made a mistake in coming up to the study instead of waiting downstairs to be announced.

"So you're going to be married," said Roger. He sat and gazed at and through Anthony.

"It seemed the best thing to do," replied Anthony, hardly knowing what he said.

"Well, well," said his uncle, gazing at the hearth. "To Fanny, of course?"



"Yes. To Fanny."

"Well, I have no doubt you're a very fortunate young man."

"Thank you. I'm only too fortunate ; I feel——"

"Do you know anything about her—circumstances, relations, and so forth?" Roger interrupted, fixing him with a gaze which seemed to have the burning coldness of liquid air.

"I've met her stepmother ; I don't know much about her past life. She tells me she has had an affair with someone else——"

"Yes?"

"She is remarkably unsophisticated ; I believe she thought I should give her up on account of it."

"You were not distressed, then?"

"I think it was a shame, poor little dear. I don't mind personally."

"Shouldn't you think it more satisfactory to know who the person was?"

"It's nothing to me. It only lasted a week, you know."

"I don't wish to seem—sententious——"

"Oh, heavens!"

"Or presuming——"

"Impossible!"

"But has it occurred to you that you may feel differently a little later? One is bent on disregarding something at the time it might prove an obstacle to one's wishes ; but afterwards, when the wishes are fulfilled—might one perhaps go back to it as something important? One has heard that people feel rather differently about their wives than about the girls they become engaged to. But perhaps you are too hard-headed?"

"Yes. I think I am. The point is, my life up till now has been—scattered and hopeless."

"You've not been well," said Roger quickly.

"Well, anyhow, habits of ill health and so on—it's all been hopeless. Well, now I see a way to put a stop to all that, d'you see? You see, this girl—you may think I'm mistaken——"

"No, I don't indeed."

"I *know* she's the thing for me. I don't say she's in love with me, but I think she can be, d'you see? Perhaps she could with anybody. I don't know. But, once I've married her, I shall feel quite safe. Well, that's a good deal to say, you *know*."

"Yes, indeed."

"Well, then, I don't want to start up a lot of old tales. I don't care who this fellow was ; I don't want to know. I'd rather not know, if it comes to that. It's absolutely nothing in the world to me. If I *knew* that she'd been a prostitute—which isn't very likely !——"

"No."

"It wouldn't make any ~~diff~~erence."

"I should disagree with you there, I think. But still, the question hardly arises."

"You see, if I don't know who this chap was, it'll all go out into space much quicker."

"I applaud your good sense ; I'm only amazed at such—ruthlessness ? "

"Oh, well ; anyhow, you see the point ? "

"I'm very glad you are comfortably settled. You're looking well."

"I feel made over again. I hope you'll come and see us as soon as possible."

"It's very kind of you. If you can think of anything you'd like as a wedding-present, you must tell me."

"Thanks ever so much. But really——"

"You'd better. It may save you a cruet stand."

"It's charming of you. Well, I'm very glad to have found you in."

Roger held out his hand, which Anthony clasped warmly. The clasp was not returned, and, as he hurried away, Anthony found himself slightly chilled by the restraint of Roger's manner. It might have meant nothing ; perhaps if he'd stayed longer he would have thawed him into one of those delightfully intimate conversations that made one wonder afterwards why one forgot in between that life held these prospects ; just as, after months of newspaper reading and detective novels, one forgot the impression one had received from the airy, poignant elegance of Pope, though at the time one had thought, "This is not a dream ; this is real life. I will remain in this for ever."

But the difficulty with certain people was that one never knew when they were frankly bored and wanting to be rid of one, and when they were merely shy and chilly and waiting to be warmed up.

Anthony had been enough accustomed by now to Fanny's ready little murmurs and exclamations and ripples of conversation that he could start with a word to feel how sweetly comforting they were ; not that one wanted that sort of thing in everybody, but in a wife it was perfection. He was becoming more and more attached to her every day ; she dwelt more in his thoughts as something perpetual ; not as a pleasure—that was too evanescent an idea. He only knew that he was immensely pleased and happy ; he felt obliged to be testy and ferocious with house-agents, tradespeople, and others in general, because, now that for the first time in his life he was going really to assume the

share of importance and consideration that belonged to him, he was anxious to make up for lost time.

Roger's feelings were complicated and painful. There was no doubt, in the days that followed, that they were painful. The circumstance, so trivial, so commonplace, signifying nothing in his niche of society except a little additional interest, why should it distress him? In the abstract there was nothing in it to agitate the keenest sensibility. He himself could have told Anthony of it easily, except that he could not do it without Fanny's consent. And how could he ask for that? The marriage meant, perhaps, a good deal to her (though he thought it equally possible that it might mean very little), and he was the last person who had the right to create any complication in her life. And as for Anthony, he saw clearly (and it gave him an odd thrill of dismay that he refused to recognise) how much depended on this marriage for him. There was every chance of one, perhaps of both, being extremely happy; and with Anthony's strange, grasping, ruthless attitude, that peculiar hardness and determination that James had imported, among other curiosities, into the family, any real excuse for disclosure was lacking. It didn't matter to Anthony; it would matter a great deal to Fanny. How could he say anything? It was impossible. It was not only impossible; it was in the last degree unnecessary; he knew perfectly well in reality that he would never dream of doing such a thing, possessing, as he did, not only a very considerable share of worldly wisdom, but faculties acutely rational and philosophic. And yet, as it was the combination of violent opposites into a harmonious whole that gave to his work its particular qualities of felicity and strength; as it was the complete uncertainty of how he would respond to

any given stimulus that made his conversation so startling in its charm, so his sophisticated mind was shot through with extraordinary shades of sentiment, of delicate freshness, of romance. While he regarded the situation as one about which there was no need to worry, yet he was haunted by a feeling of distress ; the situation was peculiarly delicate ; he had the feeling of discomfort he would have had in a dirty shirt. He would have experienced a luxurious relief in being able to disclose the matter to Anthony, just to let him know what he was doing ; just to keep that immaculate sense of private, family integrity, that perfect limpidness and harmony. Although abroad he was accustomed, like all his friends, to a social atmosphere in which everyone's individual concerns were made, by general consent, a topic for malicious or entertaining conversation, where, within a small radius, everyone lived wholly in the public eye, he himself had always preserved in his family that asylum "where secrecy remains in bliss." He came out to mix with the people, but he always went back again. And now, if this retreat were poisoned, he felt that he was attacked in his most vulnerable part. Not, he thought, that the feeling would remain serious ; but at the moment it was a shock ; it was something unpleasant that he would have given a very great deal to get rid of and was bound in honour to keep.

Another aspect of this complicated, æsthetic distress was that henceforth his idea of Fanny was no more. With regard to Anthony, he could only feel that he would have been relieved, sincerely glad, if anyone else had been going to marry him. With regard to her, he experienced, almost to his amusement, a very genuine dislike to her marrying anyone at all. It was

so preposterous that it was only in his mind as a nuance of feeling ; he never admitted it as a positive wish. Had it been anyone else, he would at this stage have had no feeling about the matter ; he was surprised to find that he paid her the compliment of disliking the thought of her in the possession of someone else. Long ago he had profoundly regretted the nature of their intercourse, and blamed himself for not having more quickly grasped the sort of creature that she was ; but for that very reason the memory of their brief relationship had always remained in his mind as something exquisitely pure and charming, one of the acquisitions of a lifetime. And now——

He lifted his shoulders impatiently. He was standing in a shop in Tottenham Court Road, whither he had been directed by Athene to examine some Empire chairs that she had learned from Anthony would be an acceptable wedding-present. There had been some idea that she and Roger should give them jointly, and, having admired them and enquired the price, he had decided that they would be very suitable. As his eye left the nacreous white woodwork, with the gilt rising suns and the faded olive-green brocade, it lighted on a little chocolate set of white china, powdered with violets, forget-me-nots, and rosebuds. The erect and graceful shapes of the pot and jug, and the delicate sheen and texture of the china, the gay, bloomy appearance of the whole cluster of cups, pot, jug, bowl, and tray, struck him instantly as a perfect gift for Fanny.

He groaned inwardly as he examined it ; nothing, he knew, would please her better. How much he would have liked to send it to her, to see her pleasure and receive her ardent thanks ! But now——

Wretched, wretched little girl ! It was impossible ;



a present so laden with that intimate beauty, so significant in every one of its hundred charms—to give it to her would be like dropping a bomb into her bosom. He paid thirteen guineas for it, however, and, having seen every piece safely wrapped, and ordered the chairs to be packed and sent, took it home. When he arrived, he summoned Athene, and, having unwrapped the pieces and assembled them, he said :

“ I bought this, but I should like you to give it to them.”

“ But what about the chairs ? ”

“ Henry can join me in those ; he is too busy to find anything, and will be glad of the chance.”

“ It’s perfectly charming ; was it expensive ? ”

“ I’ve paid for it ; I only want you to give it.”

“ I see. Then whom do I pay, and for what ? Shall I pay Henry your share of the chairs ? ”

“ Well, thank you. That is very accommodating.”

“ I am to do that, then ? ”

“ Please, if you will.”

He went upstairs, reflecting, among the tumult of his other thoughts, what a mercy it was to live with civilised people.

But, he thought, as she was going to be so much in the vicinity (and he couldn’t perpetually indulge this habit of flying off, vanishing at a moment’s notice), something must be said ; perhaps it was even owing to her ; some definite comment must be made on the situation so that it might be closed for ever. At least he could see her alone and give her his best wishes ; that would dispel any uneasiness she might very possibly be feeling. He himself would be extremely glad when the whole affair was over ; there was nothing except time that could smooth out these emotional crumples.

He understood that she was going to spend the next day doing odd jobs with Anthony in the new house, and coming back to tea. He would make a point of seeing her.

Fanny and Anthony were spending the day, a week before their wedding, in getting the small house in Hampstead Square in order. Everything practically was in it already—the odd pieces of furniture Anthony had accumulated ; a few things belonging to Fanny ; the beautiful Empire chairs from Henry and Roger ; from Deborah and James another clock in a sheaf of gilt rays, like their own, only without the sapphire face, which could not easily be found again. Mrs. Arne had sent a consignment of household linen on Fanny's behalf, a canteen of table silver on her own, and a dinner service which had belonged to the previous house. Their friends had sent a variety of things, some of a useful nature, such as rugs and reading-lamps and even a bedstead, and other less material gifts ; several of Anthony's had given him their pictures, and someone a Venetian chandelier, its glass branches loaded with blue and iridescent flowers and leaves and stars and birds. Marvellous wedding-presents appear when artists marry ; their friends, even their acquaintances, seem to hurry round and produce works that they have refused £90 for the previous week, or treasures that belonged to their grandfather and that they have permanently alienated half their families by appropriating. This collection was indeed wonderful, and no exception to the rule. The chandelier came from a man Anthony had only met half a dozen times and Fanny had never heard of. Then there were the charming, discreet presents from girl friends. Emma had sent two little gilt Empire candlesticks, and the mannequin,

Ivan Archer's friend, a china jug painted in rosy mauve lustre, with a moral verse painted on the side. Ivan himself had sent a drawing of foliage and water, so beautiful and so solemn that it was going to be difficult to know where to put it. Fanny knew that she ought to have been sweeping out rooms and dusting furniture, fitting away linen and even staining boards. It was a mercy, she thought, that her stepmother wasn't there, or that was what she actually would have been doing. What she had done, however, was to collect all Anthony's particular treasures—his glass candlesticks, his mirror framed in a garland of glass roses, forget-me-nots, jessamine, and butterflies, his wax flowers under glass shades, his witch balls, his blown glass grapes and elephants ; all the perishable things he had collected secretly and rather humbly, as people collect the things peculiar to what they consider one of their rather childish tastes. She had procured a bowl of warm soapy water, and, regardless of the fact that it was useless to wash anything before the house itself had been cleaned, she washed and dried all the quivering, forlorn-looking objects, until, when Anthony returned from an inspection of the paint on the walls, he saw the whole fragile, glittering heap shimmering on the table, with the light coming so clearly through them that they looked as if they could be scattered with a breath.

Anthony was extraordinarily pleased ; enchanted at the renaissance of his belongings, at the sight of Fanny, earnestly wringing out the flannel cloth ; and delighted with himself as he pointed out that they would probably all need doing over again after the dust raised by getting the rooms clean.

It didn't matter what they said ; they answered each

other at random. Anthony was not listening, and Fanny was too much moved by something of the situation that she did not consider, but only felt, that her attention was wholly concerned with steadying herself on the dim rising flood that she felt within her.

As they were sailing homewards on the top of a bus, she was thinking, "It was wicked of me to do that, to wash his things. It meant so much to him. I did it to please him, but I feel traitorous about it. They were his private things, and it wasn't for me to do that for him. It was indecent, almost. But how absurd I am. That's what I'm here for." Gradually her feelings changed ; her intimacy with him reasserted itself in her mind as the circulation returns to a frozen limb, until the warm current melts away the distress.

He did not turn to look at her face, but its image was before him, and he thought suddenly that anemones, with their white, purple-veined petals and their purple-black stamens with delicate black dust, were very much like her. But were they ? When she had her hat off at tea-time, and he noticed her grey eyes again, he dismissed the simile.

\* \* \*

They had tea by the fire with Deborah, who poured out and encouraged and told a variety of amusing and improper anecdotes, in most of which she herself had figured, until everyone was in a glow of heat and laughter and hot tea. When the meal was over, she said :

"Is your tongue moist, Anthony ?"

"Not as moist as it might be ; if you mean you——"

"I don't. I want you to stick some stamps for me."

She produced a leather writing-case, with a pile of pamphlets, another of envelopes, and a large square of halfpenny stamps.

"These," she explained, "are notices of a meeting we are arranging to bring pressure to bear on the question of raising the standard of education among elementary school teachers. Do you know that it is possible to become an elementary school teacher at the age of sixteen, on no other qualification except the London Matric.?"

"Is it? Well, it's a qualification beyond me, anyway. I couldn't pass the London Matric."

"Exactly. That's all the more the reason why you should do the little that you can, and stick these stamps on for me."

Anthony started to tear the stamps into long strips.

"In a week's time I shall be a married man," he said.

"Yes, next time I ask you to do anything useful, you'll answer, like a masculine Mrs. Major Waddell, 'Highly impertinent to me, a married woman.' At least, I suppose Fanny will say that. I shall have to treat you both with immense respect, shan't I?"

Fanny was looking at a photograph album in the corner of the room; small glossy photographs in mulberry brown of little girls with dresses off the shoulders and round combs and sashes, and little boys in similar dresses with tartan sashes or velvet suits. One child she thought she identified as Deborah was always grasping the fur of the rug and examining it instead of looking at the camera, or moving so that its face or arm came out in a blur. There was a group of Henry, a perfect picture of a child with a mass of stiff curls, sitting seraphically on an ornamental plaster pedestal, with Roger, cross and unhappy, beside him, and one unmistakably Athene, sitting solemn and uncomplaining on her mother's lap. The series went on—though the boys soon dropped out of it, occasionally reappearing in

hoods, with books under their arms—to the stage of long skirts, high necks, and full-sleeved jackets, and small hats with birds' wings at the side. Where were all the clothes now? All pulled off and put away and vanished, and with them all the concentric rings of existence they represented; but the people remained, sat here, and made the present moment, as if there had never been any other. The photographs stopped in the era of full sleeves; it was obvious that they had been collected by someone whose death had finished the collection, and that the subjects of the photographs never looked at them, perhaps would be bored and annoyed if anyone else were found doing so. Fanny was carefully sliding the book back into the shelf, hoping that her action would pass unnoticed, when she heard Deborah mention her name, and turned round to come into the conversation. At that moment, however, the door opened and Athene's head looked round. She said something quiet to Fanny, who did not hear what it was, but went to her and stood outside the door.

"Have you had a good tea?" she enquired benevolently.

"Yes, thank you, very."

"Will you look into the library before you go?"

"Shall I go now?"

"If now seems the moment. I must just write a post-card." She went into the room behind them and shut the door, and Fanny went up the first flight of stairs and entered the library.

She saw him leaning over his writing-table, with his beard and his brown coat and the glint of his eyeglass. Oh, a hundred times more beautiful, more satisfying! Never seen, never loved till now!

He came forward and took her hand; as she clung



to the miraculous fingers she lost for a moment all sense of the situation in the contact. She found herself sitting down opposite him, and hearing him say :

“ You have been so patient, so forbearing. You must have thought I ought to have done more.”

“ Oh, no. It was difficult for you.”

“ Still, that wasn't much to do with it. I honestly thought it best, my dear, not to do anything that would mark another step in the affair. I thought that if I went away and allowed it to dissolve, die out——” He was going to add, “ I wasn't vain enough to think it would mean so much to you ”; but he saw immediately that the whole thing was worse, very much worse, than he had supposed, and that just as previously he had not been able, face to face with her, to do the thing that would in the abstract have been the most sensible—treat the whole matter lightly and keep on easy, rather broad terms with her—so now he wasn't going to be able to say the things which would have summed up the situation in an exterior manner. He certainly had the heavier end of it ; however painful it might be to him, he was bound to keep himself detached and sensible, and to see her suffer as much as would be necessary. He knew that he could not even tell her how much he felt for her, that she would not be able to bear it.

“ I thought it the best thing,” he repeated gently, “ but I didn't know how very unhappy I was making you.”

“ It was the best thing,” she said. “ Looking back, I see that. I couldn't have borne a letter, or anything, saying you didn't want to have anything more to do with me.”

“ It wouldn't have been true, either ; it would merely have been one of those situations in which the letter

acts as a temporary dam, or obstacle to be overcome, but doesn't change the real affair at all."

All the animation had left her face.

"Yes," she said, "it was better, more sure, just to let it die out." Her eyes were shut, and as he looked at her convulsed, tearless face he had the feeling that the tears must be running down inside her brain. He looked at the floor, and his face was pale and drawn as he silently rubbed the fingers of one hand with the other. But he had to go on ; it was impossible to expect her to say anything, though she would, he knew, help him out if she could.

"I should like, if you would let me, just to say how much I have felt, and always shall." The words might be inadequate, but, from him, they revived for one moment her entire being ; every corner of her mind was filled with radiance and bloom and sound ; in that brief, exquisite moment she yet had time to realise with surprise how much of her there was that had lain dormant, before the light faded and darkness came down on all the surrounding flowers.

"It seems insulting to mention my feelings beside yours."

"No, no."

"But I do feel very guilty ; you were so generous, so good to me, and I have merely injured you in return. But if you could believe how much I regret——"

"Oh, please, please don't ! You're killing me." She opened her burning eyes, and as they lighted on his head her anguish receded and she felt that until that moment she had never known the pleasures of sight. After a moment she said calmly :

"You're mistaken. No one could want the best thing in their lives not to have happened to them."

"I'm afraid you are far, far too—— If there were

anything that I could have done—— But it wouldn't have pleased you for me to have treated you simply as someone to whom I had to be kind. You wouldn't have borne that. Though, if I had known how much it was being for you, I don't know whether I should have been able not to."

"It was the best thing. I can't explain clearly, but you mustn't feel anything; I don't want anything different; if it had been anything else, it wouldn't have been real. Everything has happened; you *did* love me."

"I did, indeed."

"I'm not so stupid as you think. I do see that that's all, in every sense."

He remained silent, but she felt sure that he had accepted her words in their full implication. He went on:

"It sounds heartless, when I can't do anything for you, to wish you happy. But if you would believe how much I do wish it——"

"Oh," he thought, as he saw—what had once been his delight—the way his words moved her, as a reed is swayed by a breath of wind, "how can she think it right by herself to marry him when she feels like this for someone else?"

He would have incurred any personal distress to tell her, reason with her that this marriage would be against her happiness. But would it? And it was not only that Anthony had, he saw, built his prospects so firmly round her that to do anything to frustrate the matter now would be to incur a responsibility that he shrank from contemplating. His own influence with her was so all-powerful that he did not dare to use it. And was she not perhaps right after all? She might know best. He said:

"You haven't told Anthony anything?"

"I have told him everything except the name. I didn't tell him that because I thought that really he himself would rather not know."

"I think you are quite right. But mayn't it be rather a strain on you? If you do feel it's more than you can do with—after all, we are a fairly rational set of people. I don't think it would be a matter of very great difficulty to tell Anthony, if you ever wanted to."

"I have lately thought that he wouldn't really care if he did know. So perhaps it's really for my own sake I don't tell him."

"Yes, I should think perhaps it is. I should quite understand that."

"If he ever asked me who it was, of course I would have to say."

"Yes, of course." They were both silent, while she felt that to have to show so much to someone who did not love her was terrible, and yet that in his presence she was helpless even to resent it.

"I don't say it simply because I want it so much," he was saying, "but I really think you will be happy—that things will recede a little by degrees. If there is ever anything I can do for you, you must promise to let me know."

"Yes, I will." Her voice sounded hoarse and far away, and it seemed an effort to use it.

"I think Anthony is an extremely fortunate person."

"Do you?"

It was useless; he daren't say anything. Even the conventional remarks he was producing with such difficulty were too much for her. If he were to say what he would have wished to say there would be an outburst after which she would never feel herself able to marry Anthony. There was nothing for it but to conclude everything as rapidly as possible. He sat a little

sideways in his chair, staring at the floor ; when he raised his head and looked at the window, all the suggestions of tigers gently stretching and withdrawing their claws, of beasts lifting their upper lip above their teeth, of the bronze-green pallor which invested his skin when he held his head away from the light—all the indications of suppleness, sinuosity, of what was frightening and unknown, vanished ; there only appeared revealed in the simple movement the graceful, aquiline, civilised aspect of his face, with its beauty and its haughtiness softened by distress.

As she looked at him she experienced even at that point one moment of pure and heavenly ease and lightness, that sense of being utterly freed and dispersed in air that comes with the single joy of looking at the adored face. The next instant, the fierce and violent effort of self-control seized her and made her rigid ; as she struggled with the desperate longing to go and throw herself into his arms, to say something that would make him respond spontaneously, make him show some natural, easy kindness to her, force him to kiss her, she was so overwhelmed that when he rose and held out his hand she could only make some motion towards it, and leave him without waiting for another word.

He remained in the empty room, and pressed his hands to the sides of his head ; that was done, anyhow. He never remembered to have had a more distressing and unpleasant interview. He had perhaps rather exaggerated the importance of the situation ; it would certainly adjust itself in time ; but to have one's inconsidered past moments reappearing in the bosom of the family—it was horrible and distasteful. However, he hoped, he thought, things would arrange themselves of their own accord. The present moment was

undoubtedly the worst for everyone. He decided that, on the whole, the matter was not one for anxiety. He put two books back into the bookcase and walked downstairs. It was early to go out to dinner, but, nevertheless, he put on his hat and overcoat and opened the front door. The damp leaves glistened in the lamplight, but it had stopped raining. He went out and gave himself up to the beautiful sensation of walking through retired London streets at night with rainy coolness and soft gusts in the air.

Half an hour afterwards, Deborah, who had retired to look up newspaper cuttings, came downstairs and heard that alarming and horrible sound of someone crying quietly in the next room. She hesitated, and listened again ; finally, she advanced cautiously to the door of the sitting-room on her left, and saw Anthony standing in the middle of the room holding Fanny in his arms ; she was crying with that quiet but hopeless and abandoned crying that makes people oblivious of surroundings, and as inaccessible to attempts at consolation as if they were lying underneath a river. Anthony, distressed at the sight of her grief, had become almost panic-stricken at the hopelessness of his efforts to soothe it, and the face he raised at Deborah's entrance showed her that he was on the verge of tears himself. He was extremely thankful for her appearance ; he whispered over Fanny's head, " I don't know what the matter is."

" I daresay she's just rather overdone."

" Yes, we did have a long day at the house."

" Hadn't you better take her home ? You can stay here if you like, but she might be better—then she could go to bed."

" Yes, I will."



“ I should. I’ll fetch her things.”

This conversation had faintly reached Fanny, who raised her head and realised that Anthony was clasping her in his arms, distressed yet happy, with the convulsive strength of a child. This was the last evening on which they were to meet before the wedding in a week’s time. It didn’t occur to either of them as strange that they should spend it in sobs and tears.

“ Well,” said Deborah, as she brushed her hair that night in her sister’s bedroom while Athene sat before the gas-fire in a large Jaeger dressing-gown, “ I suppose it’s all in the day’s work, but one has to go through a great deal with these young people.”

“ *Most* disturbing for you. What is going to happen to her between this and the wedding ? ”

“ She’s going into the country to-morrow to her step-mother. Have you met her ever ? ”

“ No. But I should think she’s nice—kind and sensible—shouldn’t you ? ”

“ I daresay.”

They relapsed into silence ; as she sat with her hands clasped at the back of her head, Athene felt that with a word she could have stopped this wedding. But who was she to do these things ?

\* \*

Anthony knocked off work, as it was about the time at which he expected to be interrupted by his wife with his morning coffee. He went and leaned against the window of the studio, and picked up a piece of blue-john that lay on it. The ore, a dim, bluish purple, was composed of smooth crystals, loosely sticking together. The colour hardly seemed to come to the outer surface of the crystals, but to be diffused from the centre,

elusive, smoky. The thing was so fragile, it was crumbling to pieces. He laid it down carefully, and the door opened to admit Fanny with the tray.

"I have decided that this piece of stuff represents you," he said.

"What, all brittle and falling to pieces?"

He disdained any reply, and watched her over the large rim of his cup. He was so happy. He had been married three months, and now and again he was puzzled by the memory that he had once thought of making a marriage of affection and *convenience* with her, with which love had not necessarily anything to do. These were the moments when he wondered what on earth he would do if he lost her. (He went to see *Othello*, and, with the fatuity of a person in love, saw the whole catastrophe in terms of himself and Fanny.) Or, when he was out of the house and she came into his mind, he was always assailed by the thought that he had never really enjoyed her, never said the things he wanted to say to her; she was still untouched, waiting for him. And he would hurry back with a sense that his first raptures were only just beginning.

But at other times, when his happiness was of a less mysterious nature, he had the feeling that he had correctly anticipated it, and this gave him a doubled, delightful sense of security and confidence. He felt that he was now living as he had always wanted to live, but had never been able to. He did not do much to preserve the agreeable condition of the house by his own habits. (Passingham, installed in the kitchen, had a good deal to say about him. Four women's work, *he* was.) But he regarded it nevertheless as his own creation, and he was jealous of it. Ivan, who had come and left the contents of a portfolio strewn about the drawing-room,

had remarked afterwards that Anthony was getting too snobbish for anything. He'd soon be wearing spats and telling them where to buy their gloves. Ivan, however, paid them a lot of attention just now. He had quite decided that Anthony would never be a good painter, but he was of increasing interest to him as a person. Now that the marriage was accomplished, also, it meant that Ivan could engage as much of Fanny's attention as she would allow without compromising himself, and the fact that it was such a success acted as an unconscious irritation. He wanted to be "in" on it, and be to the fore in whatever was going on. The question of the drawing he had given them was still occupying them. They hardly knew where to put it. Anthony now said :

"What one feels about modern pictures is that they're less the artists' work than one's own. You go to a show, and there they all are, looking almost all as bad as each other, and then someone picks out one for some quite discreditable reason, and takes it home, and frames it to match his colour-scheme, and hangs it up, and studies it, and, so to speak, builds it into the room, and it looks quite good, but it's ceased to be the artist's picture ; all the credit belongs to the chap who put it there. And *that's* all these pictures are good for. But you can't do that with Ivan's. They can knock a room to pieces ; they're so conservative—and——"

"I don't think this one will knock our room to pieces, because we're simple and unpretentious, and we haven't exactly got a colour-scheme, have we? I believe you'll decide on the living-room for it in the end."

"Well, I don't know." She picked up the tray and was moving off ; he put out his hand to catch the

string of the little apron she wore, and tried to think of something else to say about Ivan's picture. He adored these morning conversations. They were the *allegro* movement of the day. He wished that the little kicked-out satin slippers she wore about the house before lunch would last for ever ; he wished that she would knock into something, so that he could tell her sharply to be careful, and mind where she was going.

As he strode down the street before lunch in the cold, early spring weather, he thought, " The reason why Thackeray and those people never quite come off, to me, is because they never see, or admit, that it's possible to have pure, unmitigated bliss. Even Edgar Wallace has a little viewpoint of life that's missed out of them." He went into the Lamb and Flag and ordered a sherry and bitter while he watched several workmen playing darts. It seemed a very good game ; he wondered whether it mightn't be a good plan to buy a dart board and some darts. That sort of thing was so useful when people came in in the evening. It created at once that kind of fluescent atmosphere in which one could really get a party going. He had some little cats on wheels which one could race by blowing them across the table ; these had had quite a *réclame* ; but he fancied the darts might be even better. The bother with all these devices was that they were a target for the silliness of the young women his friends brought with them. He was fond of having people in and of going out, but at the same time there were always so many reasons why one shouldn't. Particularly now. The last time they had been going out, Fanny, who usually dressed herself more quickly than he did, came into his room and sat on his bed while he finished. As she moved across in her long pale-blue dress to blow

out the candles, he was so much struck that they never got to the party at all. But when people came to the house it was of course different. He had in the last week sold two pictures for £21 and £15 respectively, so he felt he could afford to buy the dart board from the Lamb and Flag, which was certainly a much better one than one could find elsewhere.

Fanny found that with her own income and Anthony's, who received from his father £200 a year, and from what he earned—which came, or would come, to about £200 a year—it was possible to live in a good deal more comfort than she had anticipated. It was possible to have in a woman to do the rough cleaning, which had been her nightmare, since she had thought that, if they had Passingham, she ought to do everything else herself. She gave herself up willingly to the business of looking after and entertaining Anthony. Nor was this so simple as it sounded. She felt obliged to conceal the work she did about the house, the washing, mending, dusting, and occasional washing up. He adored the results of a domestic woman, but the sight of such a creature was abhorrent to him ; all the effects had to be created as if by magic. It was quite possible to accomplish, and even amusing, but it took more time and thought. The social demands on her time were perhaps the heaviest ; not that they were felt to be onerous in exactly the same way, for, living with a young lover, it was necessarily impossible to give him pleasure except by easy spontaneity. Although she felt that she could never sufficiently discharge the duty she owed him of being everything that he could wish, she realised that to give him a forced attention, or compliance, would have been as useless as it would have been to try to appear more attractive to him by making up

her face. She had always been fond of him and of his society, and her affection increased rapidly by studying to please him ; she used therefore to be perfectly fluid in her existence, always at his beck and call to look out of the window or talk to him while he cleaned his brushes, and never broke off any conversation with him in which they were sincerely interested to attend to any domestic duties. Consequently, she had to do her work in the little time left over from him, and sometimes to be reprimanded when the lunch was late.

This was not often, however. Passingham was invaluable. In the afternoons, when Anthony went for his walk, Fanny, if she hadn't gone with him for any reason, would often go into the kitchen, unless Passingham were out as well, and sit in one of the rocking-chairs on the hearth and darn or sew by the light of the fire. It was delightful to talk to Passingham, who always called her Miss Fanny, although she never omitted to refer to her as Mrs. Simon or the mistress. She gave a reassuring sense of security to the household by identifying herself and her capabilities with it ; she always said, " They haven't sent us so and so," or " We never do under a pound and a half a week." On the other hand, she seemed at times almost to exclude Fanny from the scene altogether. Fanny would say, " I think we might have such and such a thing for dinner," and the reply would be, " That'll be all right, Miss Fanny." Then they either had it or not, just as Passingham thought suitable. But her official manners were perfect ; her appearance, too, was striking and irreproachable. Fanny had suggested that she might prefer not to wear the ordinary black and white uniform, but to appear as a housekeeper. Passingham, however, had disdained the notion. She answered the



door, tall, full-bosomed, with her mild, fresh-coloured face set off by the most immaculate black dress and starched apron. Her "I'll see ; will you come this way please ?" to the people who looked in to find her or Anthony seemed to Fanny almost too imposing, and to give a wrong idea of their menage, but it delighted Anthony.

It was one of the curious things about men and women, Fanny thought, that though, for instance, she was the member of the household who made the least work, and was responsible for all Passingham's comfort, and knew her intimately, yet she never quite liked to "speak to" her, as the saying is, about anything. Anthony, on the other hand, who couldn't have told her what to order for dinner or what to do if the pipes had burst, and who simply made work, as Passingham herself said without reserve, nevertheless was perfectly able to ask her to do anything without trepidation or compunction, and she never resented it. Men have, Fanny thought, a reserve of strength and calmness ; they are not disturbed by the agitations that shake the female mind. Men know that stray cats on a winter's night do not feel the cold ; that the discomfort dogs endure in vivisection is practically nothing ; and that the hordes of match-sellers, pavement-artists, and flower-women, who appear so helpless and forlorn, have only to go to the Relieving Officer to be provided with everything they want ; and the reason that they do not go to him is that they are, in most cases, a damned sight better off than we are. Not that this was quite fair to Anthony, who had great sensibility. But something behind all the surface aspects of his nature impressed her, glimpsed here and there, as strong and resistless. There was never, she felt, any question of condescending to him.

One of the agreeable features of her life was an intercourse with Lydia ; the latter showed herself very friendly and pleased to have someone to go about with, now Fanny had definitely become a part of the family. Perhaps also she was a little grateful to her and a little sympathetic. She used to come to lunch, exchange novels, and go shopping with her. They both enjoyed each other's comments and purchases ; an Irish linen shop in Bond Street was a favourite haunt. They went there first because Athene, asked by Lydia what she wanted for a birthday present, had replied firmly :

“ Pocket handkerchiefs. Large linen ones, mind. Not the sort you use.”

To their mutual delight they discovered some—large, indeed, but very fine, semi-transparent, with a border of delicate white lines that had rather the effect of the milky spirals in Venetian glass. Fanny thought that, as a bride, it was a justifiable extravagance in her to buy some table and tray cloths with Irish lace let into them, and she was warmly supported by Lydia in the idea. It was a relief to Lydia to find that Anthony's wife could have leanings to fine ladyism. They neither of them made any demands on the other, but they liked each other a little better each time they met.

With the rest of the family, it surprised Fanny to find that she had an almost morbid shrinking from coming upon their notice. It was so strange to be in a state in which, although their society meant as much to her as ever, she put off opportunities for seeing them, thinking, “ Any time will do.” Indeed, on being taken by Anthony to a party at which Deborah was present, she had sat quite a long time in full view of the latter, and only with an effort moved to go and speak to her when she reminded herself that not to do so would be

positively discourteous. Deborah, red faced, grey haired, highly intelligent, rather uncouth, and altogether charming, and wrapped up in a red and yellow mandarin coat, from whose bulky folds her hand and arm came out with astonishing delicacy, shook hands and said :

“ I thought you weren’t going to know me.” Fanny laughed, and sat down by her, and for a few moments enjoyed the buoyancy and vivacity of her intellect with a pleasure akin to that of rapid motion. She left her side with so much precipitancy, however, when someone approached to ask Miss Simon to come and take part in a charade, that she couldn’t help feeling her attitude had been almost unfriendly, and laughed to herself over the absurdity of the situation. Similarly, when she and Anthony went to lunch with James one Sunday, the latter said to her, “ I think you ought to come and see me more.”

“ Well, of course, I should love to.”

Her father-in-law shook his head sceptically ; he added :

“ You oughtn’t to find it difficult to get about at your age. With me, now, it’s different.”

He was delighted, however, that she did not go about much. He thought it excellent, though he affected to complain to his family in private that Anthony was really getting beyond him, and that he believed he liked his father to go to tea so that he could tell him to wipe his shoes on the mat and not to sit on the newspaper.

Anthony was, indeed, fond of having his relations in the house ; he derived a particular satisfaction from it, though he did not realise that his father had detected it. James was, however, malicious ; Anthony mingled a great deal of affection and pride in his pleasure. He

and Fanny decided that they might ask Deborah to come and spend a week-end with them. Anthony thought it suitable, after her having been so kind to them, and Fanny, that it would be very nice, and also a good opportunity to repair her negligence. When Anthony rang up, however, Athene answered, and said that she knew Deborah was engaged for that week-end, and enquired benevolently if they would like her to come instead ? One of those irresponsible moments had descended on her as she took up the receiver, in which she became transmuted into the airiest confection of soft mockery and gentle impertinence ; so that the people she addressed in these rare fits dared not laugh, and hardly dared to breathe, in case they shattered it and blew it all away.

Anthony was enchanted ; it would be delightful ; and he began forthwith to drop hints to Fanny. She mustn't insist on showing Athene all over the house in the exasperating way brides always did, and she mustn't tell her the trouble they'd had about the bath, nor tell her who had given them the different things unless she asked. He did not actually think that Fanny would commit any of these *bêtises*, but it gave him a kind of pleasure to enumerate them and reflect that nothing of the sort would occur.

Fanny, as the week-end approached and it was time to begin thinking about sheets and candles and dinners, was conscious of a curious, lurking anxiety through her preoccupation. As she paused in the spare bedroom, arranging violets and lilies in a bowl, she was conscious of an almost painful eagerness to have nothing overlooked that could contribute unobtrusively to Miss Simon's comfort.

"It isn't," she thought, "the merely schoolgirlish

feeling of 'Whatever will she think?' if anything is wrong, though I daresay there's that too." But she knew that it would be a real pain to her if the guest were to want anything which she could have supplied. On the surface, absurdly disproportionate; but the fact that she had so long associated Athene with Roger was responsible for it. She dared not examine any further into the state of her feelings, but she went about in a dim, painful transport that entirely possessed her. She sat down to write letters, but got up again, and then, ashamed of herself, sat down and wrote several.

Miss Simon arrived before dinner the next evening. Her entrance, greeted by Anthony, occurred when Fanny was upstairs lighting the candles in the spare room and sweeping a few fresh cinders off the hearth. She hurried out, and met them at the head of the staircase. Miss Simon stooped down and kissed her from within the folds of a fur coat in which she seemed entirely to have disappeared. Fanny was so much fluttered that she merely took the suit-case and conducted her in silence to the bedroom door. But she was one of those people, Anthony reflected, as he watched them, who not only have transparent faces but whose whole persons express a flow of exclamations and ideas and emotions, and make conversation, for the moment at which they are moved, unnecessary.

"This is lovely," said Miss Simon gently as the door opened on the room, with the warm whiteness of the bed in the firelight and the violets dark against the lacy dressing-table. It occurred to Fanny for the first time that the bunches of wax candles which seemed quite natural to her looked rather affected in the presence of Miss Simon.

"I'm afraid," she said, "that this isn't exactly the sort

of room for you, but I hope you'll find it warm and comfortable."

"Good gracious me, child," exclaimed Miss Simon briskly, taking off her glasses and rubbing them with a pocket-handkerchief. "I'm not a picture or a piece of furniture, to need a special kind of room, am I? Why shouldn't I do as well in one kind of room as in another?" She put the glasses on again, and peered down into Fanny's face in an irresistibly comic manner.

"Am I to wear my evening dress?" she next enquired.

"Oh, yes, please! What is it like?"

"I don't know what it's like, exactly. I think the lady who invented it rather hoped it wasn't like anything else."

Fanny unwrapped the tissue paper lying on the top of the suit-case, and revealed a material of gold flowers and sprays on a thin black ground.

"How charming!" she said, lifting it up. "And long sleeves. It looks Italian."

"Well, it was insisted by my family that I should have a respectable evening dress."

"Yes, of course it was. This is lovely. Were they pleased? Where did it come from?"

"A lady called Maude Moore, in Piccadilly." Fanny was annoyed with herself for having followed her first question by her second. She could not now go back and ask what had been thought of the dress—find out what Roger thought of it. She blushed, and, saying she would leave Miss Simon to dress, hurried out.

When Athene came downstairs in the black and gold dress, Fanny was surprised to see how ceremonious Anthony's behaviour to her was; his attentiveness and assiduity were far more conscious than hers; Miss



Simon, lying in a long chair by the fire after dinner, seemed to accept it without surprise or dislike. The conversation was charming, and was carried on principally between him and Athene, while Fanny sat in a corner on the hearth. Anthony was certainly looking very alluring ; the half-cross, half-eager appearance he always wore when he was putting himself out for any purpose added a delicious element of youthfulness to his politeness. To him Athene talked with something of his own manner ; it was to Fanny she made the spontaneous, absurd, *sotto voce* remarks. Fanny herself found it impossible to be anything but completely natural with her, as she had always found it with Roger. Awkward, confused, indiscreet, perhaps, but that was the point ; when one felt awkward it was impossible not to show it. She could not help wondering, however, that Athene's attitude to them was not reversed. The fact was that Miss Simon, though she was more stimulated by the society of men, and enjoyed their admiration, really preferred that of women ; she had that particular appreciation of the company of her sex that belongs to women who were brought up to take an interest in the Woman's Movement. She was always careful to turn her eyes away if she saw anyone looking at her, but, while Fanny now studied the fire, she took a long look at her, and felt that of the two that was the one she would like to talk to, if circumstances had allowed it.

When tea and Anthony's malted milk were brought in at ten o'clock, Anthony was rather shocked at the appearance of his own beverage, and wished he had had the forethought to have it in his bedroom instead. Fanny divined his thoughts, and explained that she made him take it.

" I approve of it," said Miss Simon. " Most suitable."

She looked impassively at her long, narrow lap with the gold stars on it. The marriage was certainly a success as regards Anthony, she thought. They accompanied her upstairs into her room, and she kissed both of them good night.

"It's funny, isn't it," said Anthony, pulling off his clothes and throwing them all over Fanny's room, "that Athene should have that marvellous black dress and a flannel nightgown."

"I don't think so. I thought the nightgown was delicious. So soft and warm. I shall have one."

"No, you're not to. Besides, you couldn't carry it off as she does. I suppose you're right, really. She can carry off even a flannel nightdress."

Fanny, sitting up in bed, felt she ought to object to having Anthony's clothes thrown over her belongings. It was true that she could not hope to eradicate the habits of a lifetime ; but might he not throw them about his own room ? But then, she thought, why should one forgo the advantages of being married to one's own young lover instead of to some dreadful male whose clothes made her feel sick ? She did not experience any feelings of revulsion when Anthony's shirt was thrown down on top of her own underclothes, so she might as well spare herself the pain of expostulation, and be thankful. She lay down, and suddenly she experienced an acute relief that Anthony was going to spend the night with her. He came in from his bedroom in his pyjamas, and she wanted to tell him to hurry up and come to her. She found herself in a curious state of uncomprehending agitation ; every time Athene's face, smiling down at her, recurred to her mind, she endeavoured to explain the smile, until her mind was so wearied that, when the visual image

arose, she pursued her thoughts more and more confusedly, and for a shorter distance, until at last, as it recurred, she was merely struck with dizziness. She kept awaking out of a minute's sleep and half remembering where she was, and what she was. She clung to Anthony, answering his caresses, reminding herself over and over again that she had every right to, that she ought to do it, till she was fully aroused by a voice in her ear saying in a surprised tone, "Darling, you're being a very good girl, aren't you?"

She sat up in the relief of returning consciousness and pushed back her damp hair. Then she lay down again in a strange, unthinking calm, and fell asleep, unconscious of Anthony's passionate company.

\* \* \*

The visit was a great success, and, when Anthony proposed that they should have Roger to lunch, Fanny was so much wrought up to self-possession that she said they certainly ought to ask him.

"Only," she added, "would he want to come?" They hadn't very much to offer in the way of amusement for Roger. Anthony said he thought that anyway he should be asked; it would be neglectful not to ask him. He could easily refuse if he didn't want to come. Roger did not need to be protected against any quixotism of his own which made him do the things he didn't want to, he assured her.

She felt she had made enough resistance, and, indeed, now that the matter had been broached, she was anxious to meet it, to conquer all the difficulties it presented. If her eagerness sprang from mixed causes, she did not examine them, and so much unqualified pain must be apprehended from having him

in the house, and being obliged to harden herself against the exquisite flowering of life that his presence brought, that she may well have suspected nothing of them. It would, however, now she came to think of it, be a very good thing to ask him to come ; to show him once that they could meet ordinarily, and for ever afterwards to leave the problem of their intercourse with him. It occurred to her that if Anthony conveyed the invitation, Roger might, acting for her own good, refuse it, and the idea of such a shelving of the situation was intolerable to her. She immediately left the dusting of her mantelpiece and went downstairs and wrote a brief note saying how pleased Anthony and she would be if he would come and have lunch with them any day next week convenient to him. She put it into an envelope and carried it unsealed into the studio ; Anthony glanced at it, admired the elegance of his wife's note-paper, and put it into his pocket, saying he would go to the house that evening and deliver it in person.

"By the way," he said, "have you got anything I could use as a background for this group ?" He led her over to a table where he had arranged a china jug, a Japanese doll, and a small flowering plant. "You see the sort of thing I want—something light, and with not too much colour."

She paused, and mentally reviewed the possible pieces of stuff in the house ; but nothing occurred to her. She became conscious of Passingham hovering, with a determined eye upon her, in the passage, so she said hastily, "Well, look through my drawers, but don't cut anything up without showing it to me, will you ?"

"I shan't want to cut it ; I shall simply crumple it up behind these things."

“ You may find something ; I can’t think just at the moment.”

She left him and returned to her morning duties. Anthony went upstairs and delighted himself in turning out her drawers ; none of the ladies with whom he had previously been connected had worn things like this. He was familiar with all her sets of underclothes, but he came across a few little things he had never seen before, and dawdled over them, and then finally he opened a drawer in which she had stowed odds and ends—frocks she had brought with her and never worn since her wedding, and remnants of summer clothing. He selected something that he thought would meet the case exactly and went downstairs with it.

That night he came back with the answer that Roger would like very much to come on Tuesday.

“ Have you thought what to have for lunch ? ” he asked, frowning anxiously.

“ No,” she answered absently. “ Does it matter ? ” He turned round, and said sharply :

“ If you don’t want to have him, and don’t intend to take any trouble, please say so.”

“ No, Anthony, really,” she replied, “ I do want him to come very much. I am extremely glad he is coming. I was only meaning that with him his coming is the thing, and not the lunch. It isn’t so very important what he eats, is it ? ”

He smiled delightfully. “ I think you’re rather idealistic. Good food is not thrown away on anybody in my family, except perhaps Henry.” She laughed, and promised to do her best. But nevertheless she did not, could not, make any out-of-the-way preparations. She reasoned with herself, admitting that Anthony was right—that he was particular, almost epicurean ; that

most of his acquaintance would have made this an occasion for their elaborate efforts ; but she thought, " Perhaps it is blinding obstinacy on my part, but instead of studying his particular tastes I feel it is right to give him my own idea of what one should eat."

Anthony, painting rather busily, left it all with supreme confidence to her ; on the morning of the day she enquired if Passingham had anything at hand for soup. It would not have greatly ruffled her if there had not been, though actually there was a beautiful combination of chicken and vegetable juices which had been accumulating for three days. A green salad broken up in a bowl, an omelette, a translucent milk jelly piled up with cream streaked with ginger syrup—it could all be made in half an hour ; she left the table, rather primly set out, starched and glittering (she conceded this to Anthony), and went upstairs and changed her dress. She brushed the thin black strands of her hair, and put on an old paste necklace, hyacinth blue, that Anthony had bought in King's Road ; as she sat on the corner of the chest that formed her dressing-table she pondered that she had never asked herself whether she was beautiful in relation to Roger. Was she clean, was she neat, was her hair properly cut, were her clothes the right colour?—all these questions had occupied her, but she had never wondered whether she was looking pretty. With Anthony she was always conscious of the fact that she was or was not. When, covered with grime from the boxroom, with her head enveloped in a handkerchief, she said, " I defy you to say that I'm pretty *now*," she knew even at that instant that she must be looking pretty, and was not surprised at Anthony's saying so. But with Roger—she had prepared a toilette for the opera, and was meaning



to dress with great care, when she heard his step outside the door and stopped, with her dress half off, leaning against a wardrobe ; her heart beating, merely at the idea of his looking in on her before he went to his dressing-room. He came in, dressed, a little later, and she was still without her frock, and had to dive into everything and snatch up her carefully collected odds and ends, smoothing her hair without a second look in the glass. Usually she checked herself, on the occasions when she indulged in these recollections, anticipating the pang of relinquishing them and facing the world again. But now, as she looked at her little clock and saw that it was ten minutes to one, she realised that she could withdraw gently from her reverie, and, going downstairs, find him actually in the house. The closed doors muffled any sound of arrival ; she went and peered over the banisters, and there was his hat, lying on a chair. She went back to her bedroom, and, hardly knowing what she did, unclasped the heavy necklace and laid it down. Then she went downstairs and listened ; they were in the studio. The dining-room door was open, and she peeped in ; everything seemed to be looking very nice. Passingham, already in her afternoon black and white, was folding table-napkins. From her solid and handsome demeanour one would never have guessed how free and conversational she was in private. She saw Fanny peeping round the door with a restless, frightened look, and said in an encouraging whisper, " We've done our best, miss, and those who don't like it had better go somewhere else."

" I'm sure everyone will like it very much," whispered Fanny in reply. " It looks very nice. I'll go and say it's ready."

She went slowly to the door of the studio and opened

it ; he was standing with his back to her, and Anthony was beside him, explaining the values of a group of objects he had assembled ; a jug, a small bowl, a package done up in grocer's blue paper, and behind them a flowered material—the little dress with the powdering of flowers and rows of silver buttons.

“ And I chose this, you see,” Anthony was saying, “ for the background. The flowers represent the emotion of the thing.”

There was a pause ; slowly Roger turned his head round. The eye-beam from the dark agate eye behind his glasses, directed at her from under the eyebrow, with its perpetual arch of questioning and surprise, invited her to consider this moment. A spark of resentment glowed in her. There was no responsibility accepted, no active pity that would immediately exert itself to cover up the situation ; only a high, detached remoteness—but it was all so momentary. Anthony said, “ Here you are.” And she held out her hand to Roger, saying she was pleased to see him, and that lunch was ready, and, as she led the way to the dining-room, her resentment vanished, and she only thought, “ It was a horrible jar ; why should I want to throw the difficulty all on him ? ” She took her place at the table with unusual animation, and enquired, with a suitable mixture of shyness and interest, if his new book was going on satisfactorily.

As she paused, and was relieved by Anthony, who began to describe a Renoir collection at present on exhibition, she stole long glances at his profile and his coat, and felt an oncoming of emotion that might become intolerable ; she raised her head, conscious of a deep blush such as overspreads one after a momentary panic ; and such a passionate determination sprang

up in her to make things as right as might be that when the Renoir discussion was concluded, she asked him, exerting all her conversational address, what he thought of the party intrigue in the French Cabinet, and for some time positively enjoyed a very spirited discussion for its own merits.

Roger himself, faintly uneasy in the equivocal situation, felt more composed as the meal proceeded, and was almost in a condition to appreciate Anthony's remark about the frock. She had borne it well, he thought, as he raised his table-napkin to his lips ; he ate noiselessly, but soup he drank loudly, with the unconcern of the highly bred. He complimented her on the arrangement of the flowers. Did she or did she not feel it as she had been used to feel everything he said ? A glance at her face assured him that she did ; from henceforth he addressed all his remarks to Anthony, but with a particular graciousness and charm, an indirect kindness to her. The fact that she was his hostess, and that his treatment of her appeared to verge on the pointedly neglectful, was thought nothing of by Anthony, accustomed to the behaviour of relations both shy and ruthless.

He purposely made a brief stay after lunch, rising to go, in fact, immediately after coffee. Anthony did not attempt to detain him, but thanked him for having come ; he was both too tactful and too diffident to say he hoped he would come again. Roger thanked them in return, and, while admitting to himself that his sisters were right in saying that marriage had improved Anthony's health and appearance, he personally felt that it had, in some way, detracted from his charm. The boy was becoming blurred in the young married man ; he was, however, willing and thankful to sacrifice any

pleasure he might have derived from the society of the unmarried Anthony—tiresome, harassing, but with that adorable, bewitching quality of boyishness—for the security which he felt in the present situation. It was really very much better than he could have anticipated. He was afraid she must still be unhappy, but clearly she had perfect command of herself. Time, time, was everything. But he wondered, as he walked up the street, why, at the last moment, she had stepped forward with a smile and helped him with his overcoat. Was it not wantonly renewing memories, associations, that she must know should be left to sink and cease? He did not realise that her memory of everything connected with him was so accurate that she was in no danger of stumbling on something that would recreate a past scene. She had never, in the whole of their intercourse, helped him with his coat; he did not remember that she had not. But when she stepped forward in the hall she knew that she was doing nothing wrong, unless it were in adding to her experiences.

\* \* \*

“Anthony’s wife is going to have a baby,” announced Ivan Archer over the small dinner-table to Susan Heywood.

“Really?” she said. “I met them on the heath on Sunday morning, and they didn’t tell me anything about it. Perhaps they thought it wasn’t the place.”

“They haven’t told me anything about it,” answered Ivan, “but you can always tell. Girls get a particular kind of look——”

“Well,” said Susan, “he always said he was going to make her as interesting as possible as soon as possible.”

Susan was making her way delicately and rapidly

through the trout and braised celery and the particular kind of fruit cup that Ivan always ordered. She was frankly greedy, though no one would have suspected it from her perfect mannequin's figure, and, as evenings with Ivan were apt to be unsatisfactory, she always made the most of the food.

"It's funny," continued Ivan, gazing over the congested space of the dancing-floor with its passing couples, "but they get a kind of look in the face long before they begin to show it anywhere else. I don't mind betting you, though, Anthony hasn't spotted anything. It's a kind of—well, one hardly knows what to call it."

Susan raised her glass; she had not, beautiful young virgin, come to the Green Park Hotel to talk about the symptoms of pregnancy; she was so much exasperated each time she went out with Ivan that she always decided that time should be the last. His habit was to dance half a dance and sit out for the rest of the time, commenting on the beauty of the other women, and to leave just before the cabaret show began. The least enthusiasm in his partner invariably reacted upon him as a profound depression. Susan had by now perfected the art of consuming a great quantity of expensive food and maintaining an appearance of lifelessness, an attitude which, by irritating Ivan and making him want to shake her up, ensured that she would dance at any rate twice in the evening. She felt the more cheated and angry in that she rightly guessed that Ivan thoroughly appreciated the company of a modish partner. Other girls were taken here and there, but it was always Susan who was chosen to accompany him to the Green Park or the Berkeley. She grudged her perfect appearance, her white lace frock, her green wreath, her crystal bracelet; she was annoyed with

herself for having taken pains with it before she came out. It was certainly a proof of the argument that modern youth was mad for pleasure, she thought, that it should be willing to look for it in such unlikely places as an evening in Ivan's company. When she met Anthony the next afternoon in the studio of a young man who had asked her to tea, she was still irritated enough to be feeling spiteful. She took the opportunity of the host's running downstairs to borrow a pot of jam to say, "Well, Anthony, you're looking seedy." She curled herself up, sleek and catlike, on a divan, and began to take off her gloves. "You ought to have a baby," she added, with a sidelong twist of her neck; she never lost her poise, for she always dropped her annoying remarks with a complete lack of emphasis.

"Well, I am going to have one as soon as I can," replied Anthony in an aggrieved tone of voice, collecting his hat and scarf in readiness to go.

Susan stretched out her long silk legs. "Ivan says you've started having one already, only he's sure you haven't noticed it," she drawled, and ended by looking up at him with a face of pure merriment.

Anthony hesitated for some annihilating response, but he and Susan were old friends, so he said finally in a shaky voice :

"There's something you can't put your finger on about Ivan. He's absolutely outrageous."

"Yes, it's quite true there is," answered Susan, quite reconciled to Anthony, and feeling indignant on his behalf. She turned her little head round as the host entered with a dish of marmalade in one hand and a loaf in the other.

"Won't you stay?" he asked Anthony.

"No," said the other, "I must be off." He ran down



the stairs and out into Fitzroy Street, whence he rapidly made his way back to his own house.

Fanny, it being Passingham's afternoon out, was washing handkerchiefs in the scullery. She kept the bills down in such little ways as much as she could, but as far as possible without the observation of Anthony. She would have been distressed to be caught by him like this, but she felt so sleepy and heavy that she was not sensible of anything but surprise when he burst into the scullery. He came up to the sink with that expression of cold fury that always reminded her of the poisonous green rust on copper.

"Are you going to have a baby, my dear?"

She raised her languid eyes.

"I—yes, I think I must be."

"And may I ask why I am the last to hear about it?"

"The last, Anthony?"

"I am indebted to Ivan Archer for the information, via Susan."

"What *can* you mean? I never said a word to anyone. How can you think I could? I was waiting to tell you till I felt quite sure about it." The hopeless perplexity and distress were so apparent in her face that Anthony's worst thought—that she had mentioned it to Ivan before saying anything to him—was at once removed, and he was left in a passion of impotent rage at Ivan's penetration and superciliousness. But at such a moment these outside considerations could not long prevail. He took her by her damp hands, and, shedding his outdoor clothes by the way, led her into the living-room. In his tenderness and delight, and the interest of asking her how and what she felt, he completely forgot Ivan and his outrageousness. Fanny had been hurt and shocked—it seemed strangely rude and unkind to

someone in a somewhat sensitive condition. But, while feeling it was not what she could ever have done to anybody, she was only too glad to forget it and to solace herself with Anthony's loving kindness.

Anthony himself was rather ashamed of being so very much interested and excited about the matter, and stipulated, in order to save his face, that Fanny was not to sit about making baby-clothes. It was an occupation, he said, that was so irretrievably embedded in cant phrases that one could no longer regard it as a merely useful and necessary proceeding. Fanny was perfectly willing not to make baby-clothes; and, indeed, Mrs. Arne, who had now to be informed of the matter, came down and at once assumed that she had much better not make them. "I know what it will be," said Mrs. Arne, and Passingham agreed with her. Her stepmother arrogated to herself the preparation of everything that was necessary, and, retiring into the country, sent forth parcels at intervals of every ten days, which Fanny looked at, admired the beautiful stitchery, sighed, and put away into a cupboard in the bathroom.

It so happened that the commission of M. Sureau to decorate his house, which, owing to one thing and another, had been indefinitely postponed, was renewed just at this time. Fanny and Anthony bemoaned themselves in private, and Anthony had some thoughts of refusing it, but Fanny persuaded him that it would be folly; he would only be away four months or so, and he could come back for flying visits as often as he liked. M. Sureau, in fact, when he understood the position of affairs, was exceedingly kind and accommodating; so within a week, when they had looked out the designs he had made last summer, and packed them up, Anthony set off, regretfully and feeling rather heroic.

They had come to the decision so quickly just between themselves, though Anthony had, of course, informed James, and said good-bye to the family, that Fanny, left alone, had to encounter repeated shocks of amazement from those of her connections among whom the news gradually leaked out.

Rosemary, whom she took this opportunity of inviting to tea, was scandalised.

"Do you mean he's gone away?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes. He has been engaged to paint some walls in a house in Paris."

"Why didn't you go with him?"

"He'll finish much quicker if I'm not there. Besides, it would have been difficult."

"Well," said Rosemary, "George and I haven't been separated since we've been married, except once, when he had to go up to the North on a conference for the firm, and I didn't go with him because I had a bad cold, but he'd booked the room for us and everything."

"Well, of course, one doesn't want to part with one's husband, only sometimes——"

"Well, I think it's perfectly awful for you. I should never let George—and I know he'd never want to. There wouldn't be any question of it."

Fanny could think of nothing to say that would meet the point; there seemed in Rosemary's mind to be some almost religious aspect connected with husbands and wives. Mrs. Arne, on hearing of Anthony's absence, commented on it in private to her relations. "He has no business to go off and leave her," she said, "particularly at a time like this. Why, good gracious, they haven't been married a year. Fanny had some cock-and-bull story about his having to go and do some work.

Fiddlesticks ! It's his business to find work that won't take him off goodness knows where. Well, they needn't think I can look after her. I have a round of visits that I am obliged to pay, and the house is going to be shut up."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Arne rearranged her visits, cancelling those that could not be altered, going with infinite trouble into the question of the maids' holidays, and having Fanny to stay with her for a fortnight, during which time she looked after her with the utmost efficiency and kindness, and all despite the fact that Fanny protested against being made such a nuisance of, and would really have preferred to remain by herself.

When she returned to town with a box of eggs and another instalment of baby-clothes, to find that Passingham had cleaned the house from top to bottom, and put up clean muslin curtains in all the rooms, and a card and message from her father-in-law asking her to ring him up and dine with him directly she returned, she felt so much surrounded by kindness of every sort that for the first time her attention began to be drawn towards the cause of it. So far she had been so much occupied with Anthony's absence and her own physical discomfort, and with that ever-present though hidden preoccupation that often came like a faint mist between her and the other concerns of life, that she had given no thought to her baby as a real person whom she would come to know. In these days, however, she came nearer and nearer to a concealed but thrilling prospect. The thought that it would be a part of Anthony increased her tenderness for him very much, but that it would be of the same blood as Roger filled her with transient, secret rapture, and wondering amazement. As she wandered about the house in the long, leisurely mornings and afternoons,

she felt an ever-increasing sense of awe and excitement, and such astonishment that she could no longer recollect herself enough to wonder whether her thoughts ought to be indulged in. It seemed to her that she herself was the person newly born ; the flowers, pictures, and objects around her were, in some inexplicable manner, seen as things new. Even Passingham's handsome and reassuring form presented itself to her as something which had never been properly observed before ; the only image which remained unaltered in her mind was that of Roger ; and, when she tried to re-read his books, the characteristic turn of the sentences brought him before her with such unearthly vividness that she had to lay them aside, shuddering. She began, in her quieter moments, to long intensely for Anthony to come back, to see for herself whether he was still the same. And then she was seized with insatiable, frantic curiosity about everything that presented itself to her in this bright, unfamiliar light. She would walk as far as she was able, examining with a devouring gaze house-fronts and squares and parks, striving to grasp the whole succession of people who had lived in them and walked through them. Where had the bricks and stones and mortar come from ? Who had worked them ? Who had planted the trees ? When did they die ? What were their descendants doing now ? How wide a circle over the earth would have to be drawn to take in the areas concerned with the growth and crystallisation of the simple scene before her, a sepia façade with the rows of sharply squared windows coloured like the depth of an aquarium, the slender wrought-iron slips of balconies, a fig-tree, a carved wooden portico, scraps of newspaper skimming about the pavement, a milkman's cart standing by the curb ? The brass ovals on the

milkcan lids sent the mind shooting down another track, into those distant regions—"But there," she thought, "I am so ignorant, I don't even know where brass is made; the motions of the mind are checked by ignorance. Not that it is particularly important to know where brass comes from, but, turning aside from the unimportant, what masses, what a whole solid world of facts, I ought to be throwing to this curiosity that I am absolutely unable to lay my hands on!" As she was in the neighbourhood of the British Museum, she hesitated a moment on the idea of going in and reading up statistics about working women, histories of State education, the development of trade unions, and, above all, the *Dictionary of National Biography*. But she had no reader's ticket, and, if she had had one, she knew that this fiery, devouring tongue that felt as if it could shoot its way through every unexplored tract, without obstacle or hindrance, would waver and fail before the fatigue of ten minutes with the catalogues two by three feet big, and the *ennui* of sitting waiting for the selected books for three-quarters of an hour at a table covered with black patent leather. She wondered as she went home, walking slowly—for the child began to be very heavy—whether these feelings were a sign that she was going to die, and the curiosity a premonition that this was her last chance of satisfying it. The thought did not cause her either pleasure or dismay; it came into her mind and passed out tranquilly. Her thoughts returned once more to their frustrated dartings in all directions; when she had washed her hands for tea she sat on the edge of the bath, examining with desperate minuteness the texture of the bath towel, and despising herself for her ignorance of factories, cotton mills, the Industrial Revolution, John Bright, and the history of Turkey.



“ I couldn’t even put my finger on it on the map,” she thought in horror. “ What a hopeless, useless creature I am ! ” But even as she got up from the edge of the bath she felt her mental energy sinking, vanishing away ; by the time she had walked downstairs, her legs trembling and unsteady with their uncomfortable burden, she was anxious to do nothing except to establish herself satisfactorily in the kitchen rocking-chair. She had nearly all her meals in the kitchen now, in the company of Passingham, who both waited on her and joined in the meal with a wonderful mixture of kindness, deference, and blunt friendliness. Fanny drank several cups of tea, and stayed idly rocking in the chair while Passingham washed up and darned a sheet. The kitchen clock showed seven before it had ever occurred to her that she was doing nothing. She marvelled at the extraordinary capacity for quiescence, the sinking of all the active faculties, of a being who is making a baby. Not only three hours, but nearly six months, had glided by since she had realised this new phase of her existence, and it had left no mark in her mind. When she looked back over it, what could she remember ? Isolated moments—a morning spent at the Simons’ house, when Deborah had unpacked, from a parcel done up in print, a broad sash of pink and green clouded satin. “ This is a christening sash,” she had said. “ I don’t know if you’d care to have it ? What do you think ? Perhaps it will be angry if it thinks it hasn’t had a new one ? ” Fanny had fingered the stiff, fraying stuff. She had longed to ask, “ Did you all wear it ? ” But the unspoken gist of the question had seemed to stand out too clearly to her troubled mind. She said hastily, “ How charming ! Is it Moorish ? ”

“ No. Why should it be Moorish ? ” asked Deborah,

with the sharpness she accorded to pointless and foolish questions. The pink and green having faded in the folds, the deep and pale streaks—rose and shell pink, and emerald and eau de nil—had given the sash a striped effect, and she had said the first thing that came into her head. She had accepted the loan of it, however, with enough genuine gratitude to please and mollify Deborah, and it now lay with other things in a box upstairs. Her thoughts reverted to it as she lay in the rocking-chair, and she wondered again what Roger had looked like with it round his waist. The general characteristics of babies, which had never seemed to her particularly interesting or endearing, had assumed a different appearance for her ever since she had been led to imagining the man she loved in an infant state ; it was inexplicable to her that so many women loved the baby in the man ; it had taken her as long as this to feel that she could have loved the man in the baby. Surely, even when he was born, there would have been something one could have distinguished—a personality dimly apprehended by his mother in her caress—that would have made the baby such a treasure, and that would have been the reason why its smallness and helplessness were so infinitely dear ? As she lay, pondering on the sensations of the woman who had, in the first few days of his life, clasped him in her arms in an intimacy that no one had ever shared, or would ever share with him again, a deep blush rose into her cheeks, and there darted into her head the notion that very shortly she herself would be experiencing something akin to those sensations. The thought blazed like lightning in her, and, from every conscious vein, excitement, eagerness, and terror seemed to flow together into one intolerable pang ; it was not until she was being

supported by Passingham and given a drink of water out of a tea-cup that she realised the pain was bodily.

\* \* \*

“MY DEAR EMMA,” wrote Fanny, “Anthony and I should be so pleased if you could come here for a week when your holidays begin. I am afraid it’s a very long way, but you did half promise when you came to see me in town, and the place itself is really lovely ; the spring is so forward—all the primroses and violets are out in the lanes, and it feels warm enough to bathe, though of course it is not ! I hope you won’t be scared away by Gerry—he really does behave quite nicely now, and I shan’t expect you to admire him. I quite see that he is very ugly really, though I have a kind of partiality for his face myself. The cottage has four bedrooms, so we could give you room to turn round in. Anthony made £400 painting M. Sureau’s house, so he’s taking a holiday now, though he amuses himself by painting most of the time, and we are all making merry. Do come and join us. I am sure it will be very good for you. I am so glad Miss Corder is agreeable, and that you don’t find the office quite intolerable. She must bless me for having left myself and recommended you in my place ; but do come down and be idle and dissipated for a week, won’t you ? ”

When she had posted the letter in the village shop, Fanny walked down to the beach, where, in a nook delightfully sheltered and sunny, her baby was playing on a rug while Passingham sat by in a frock and apron and a straw hat and read a paper-covered book entitled *Married for her Beauty*. She saw Anthony, idling at the water’s restless edge and playing ducks and drakes,

and finally, gathering her light woollen wrap round her, she sat down on the rug feeling a little lonely. For nearly ten months she had lived in this secluded place, all her perceptions narrowed into one sphere of physical emotion by the incessant care of her baby. Whether she washed its clothes, or fed it, or walked with it in her arms in the lanes above the shore, she was shut in, blinded, by this urgent, sensuous preoccupation. For the sixteen months since his birth she had looked after him, at first in London, with the assistance of a nurse, and then in the retirement of Devonshire by herself, and he had been so much an object of incessant material cares and strong physical affection that she had never as yet regarded him as separate from herself. He was dear to her because she was his mother, and because Anthony, living in this care-free intimacy with her, had become more charming and more loved. She had often thought to herself, as they wandered together a short distance from the house, where they had left the baby in the garden, that these months had put her feelings for him on a much surer foundation, and then he would turn suddenly and hit off the head of a purple knapweed, or frown as he tried to reach a mosquito bite between his shoulders, and she would feel it all blown away into thin air, and that he was a stranger.

But the baby was now attracting her notice ; she had said boldly that she wanted him to be called Roger, while she was too weak to resist the impulse that came from her heart, and Anthony had agreed readily, as he would have agreed at that moment to the baby's being taken away and dropped into a pond if this had not been likely to have distressed Fanny. For all this time she had delighted in the thrilling, satisfying emotion that she was necessary to his well-being ; his physical

dependence on her was so complete that she was deluded into thinking that it was a personal love as well as a need ; she had never read the right books, and Anthony had neglected to tell her, that in so young a child this was impossible. And, now that he was a being, with a distinct personality forming in the webs and films of infancy, she detected instantly that he was mind and spirit quite apart from her. Not that he did not delight her with his affection, but he showed already that quality, so familiar to her, of withdrawing into himself, utterly beyond the reach of another person. His concentration on the things he wished to do was, she saw, quite different from the ordinary, childish concentration, short-lived and easily broken off. When he wanted to pull the lid off one of his wooden eggs, he quickly became disgusted with his helpless, delicate fingers, and pushed it towards her for her to do it for him, but when he was looking at a picture-book or piling stones together, the slight frown on his face, and his absolute disregard of any attempts she might make to attract his attention, gave her the feeling that she would have had if she had been wantonly interrupting one of his great-aunts or uncles. With Anthony, though she was careful not to be too annoying, she never had quite this compunction. She several times made a test of Gerry's feelings, however, guiltily conscious that the people who understand how to bring up children would think it very wrong ; she would wait until she saw him intent on some object, and then lean over and tickle the back of his neck, or gently draw away the necklace or the pale blue rabbit ; always she was met with the same frown, the same expression of mingled impatience and oddly venomous annoyance. She knew that in those moments she was nothing to

him ; and, though all this pained her, it gave her a sensation of awe and fearful love to see in him, even though it were in his unattractiveness, the strong, persisting strain of the personality that she worshipped.

She sat down now on the rug and watched the child's play with nine different pebbles ; he stretched out his little fingers, now over this one, now that. His face was not beautiful, but as she saw it darkened against the background of the sea she yearned over it with maternal pride. The top part of his face was like his father's and grandfather's—sensitive and mobile all round the eyes, with the eyes themselves strangely unmoving and forbidding ; the shape of his face, however, was like her own, with a pointed chin ; and, though he was pale, it was with her transparent paleness, and not Anthony's dark pallor. His hair, ruffled by the sea breeze, was dark and fine like hers, and he wore it at present over his ears and cut across his forehead. Strangers thought him a cross little boy, because he always turned away from their advances, but he got on very well with Passingham. Fanny thought that he was a little frightened of Anthony, and hoped that Anthony would not be very severe with him later on. Anthony was now calling to her to come and walk by the water's edge, so she said good-bye to Gerry, who was about to depart for his morning rest, and went down to the firm, glazed sand, where she could feel the invisible spray on her face. Anthony was striding along impatiently.

"I've been thinking," he shouted back over his shoulder, "that when your stepmother has finished with the house, we may as well go back to it at once, and not bother about letting it for this summer."

"But— —" she exclaimed, and stopped. "Do you



want to leave here just as the warm weather begins? Wouldn't it be much better for Gerry——"

"I'm not thinking about him," replied Anthony candidly. "I want to get back and get on with things and so forth. He can stay here if you like."

"But who would look after you?"

"You would. We should leave him here with Passingham."

"Oh!"

He put his arm round her waist and started to walk with her in the contrary direction, explaining the feeling which had been growing upon him for some weeks past of need to return to London. When Gerry was extremely new, the solitude and freedom was so obviously desirable for Fanny, that he had readily agreed to their taking over the cottage, the almost forgotten property of Henry, who had once bought it for five pounds and never visited it since. He had also been pleased with the scenery and the soft air, and had felt that it was a good place to paint in. Their retirement had been encouraged on all sides, as everyone felt that it would be very good for them to be left undisturbed with their baby and each other for a time. Mrs. Arne had facilitated matters by taking over their house at a reasonable rent for the purpose of being in London for a short time and enjoying the society of various friends and relations. They had been, up till now, very happy. Passingham had accompanied them, though they sometimes sent her back to the town house for a week or so, fearing that the country scene could not be as interesting to her as it was to themselves.

Anthony had enjoyed the deeper and deeper unfolding of intimacy between himself and Fanny, just as he had been pleased with her appearance in faded and

careless clothes, with uncut hair hanging round her neck. But he had now fully experienced these delights ; he began to remember his house, with all the treasures in it which he had either half forgotten or else never as yet properly assimilated ; and the benevolent but rather infrequent postcards with which his father, aunts, and uncles answered his letters were stirring in him a desire to go back and take up his previous existence. James had been down to see them once or twice, and Athene and Deborah had spent a week at the nearest village, coming over to see them every day ; but that had been at a time when his eyes were opening to all the charms of the landscape, and he had seen them go back again in perfect contentment.

As he looked at Fanny now, her figure quite recovered to its normal grace, he began urgently to want to see her placed in different surroundings ; he remembered the thousand ways she had which could never be detected now, when she spent so much time washing baby clothes and passively attending to the child. He wanted to get back at once, at once, to enjoy with thrilling avidity those pleasures which, owing to his abstinence from them, would now be born again. His thoughts were so intense that he saw, not the long line of beach, and the flying sea, but the walls of the living-room of the London house, on which the paint had never been quite satisfactory, and which he meant to have covered with a deeper coral the moment he got back.

It was the arrival of Emma, however, whose all but cast-off clothes, specially put on for running wild by the sea, showed up the negligence and disreputable condition of their own attire, that actually drove him to announce that they would return to town in a fortnight's time.

Now that a termination had been put to their staying,

they began to enjoy everything with the economy and intenseness usual in such circumstances. Emma also, jaded by London and hard work, showed the keen delights of the land and sea once more to their eyes, which had become steeped in tranquillity and balm. The weather was becoming daily warmer, and that made Fanny regretful when every day she saw Gerry being taken down to the cove to play with the stones, as she thought of his having to put up with the garden of a London square—for she had decided that she could not leave him behind.

Emma and Anthony went out a good deal together, walking barefoot on the rocks, while Fanny wrote the necessary letters and postcards to Mrs. Arne and went about the village in search of packing-cases and time-tables. Emma seemed much calmer now ; she said that she had now given up expecting anything of life, and in consequence was in a mood to be pleasantly surprised by small pieces of good fortune. Fanny agreed that there was nothing like life in an office to make a person sensible of small blessings—hot bath water, a good night's sleep, properly made coffee, and a fine day. But she was both amused and sorry to hear Emma declaiming like this as they lay on the crumbling sea wall among tufts of toad flax and sea lavender. It reminded her, she said, of Julia Mills ; Emma said that she herself was really much older than Fanny, but that the latter had a delusion of age on her owing to the simple fact of having had a baby. Fanny laughed, and was about to contradict, when she was led away into thinking how strange it was that the things which take time, the important things that are news, seem to glide by one without one's noticing the passage of time. One marries and has a baby, almost, it seems, without knowing what one is doing, certainly without being able to help it. Her

memory of Anthony's courtship was that of one long, resistless pressure ; and all the affairs connected with Gerry—the producing of him and the endless cares connected with him—all seemed to have borne her along a course in which she exercised no conscious will or influence of her own. The things one really feels to have dated one's life are half-hours or minutes that remain for ever, while the years slip by unheeded.

She felt, lying on the sea wall and watching Anthony coming across the field with a fluttering bundle of luggage-labels he had been buying, that for all these months the perpetual sound of the sea had spread a film over her mind, and, now that she was to be taken away from it, thoughts, feelings, would rush in whose actual form she was not at present aware of ; that some new phase of her existence was waiting for her. That evening, as they drank their coffee in the stone-floored sitting-room, Anthony turned over the pages of a *Vogue* that had amused Emma in the train, while Emma herself curled up on the window-sill, watched the sea with rapt intensity, and Fanny played with Emma's little manicure box and regretfully tried to mend the shape of her broken and neglected nails. She felt that she and Anthony had already left Devonshire—it mattered nothing that their persons were still sitting in this cottage ; and, as her mind came farther and farther out of retreat, and fixed itself on the different affairs of their house and their return, it was slowly but surely pervaded with the certainty that her recent experiences had not, as she had hoped, diverted her attention from her love ; they had increased the range and breadth of her consciousness, and this had merely deepened her capacity for loving. At that moment the realisation was a crushing weight.

On their return to town, however, she was so much occupied with Gerry—in settling him into his new domain and in taking him to visit the friends and relations of Mrs. Arne, as well as his own family—that she went on mechanically as before. Mrs. Arne had two sisters who had always taken a kindly if disapproving interest in Fanny, and, as they each had children of their own, between the ages of two and six, it was felt proper that Gerry should frequently be carried out to Putney and Golders Green for the day. He did not, however, distinguish himself, as Fanny had to admit; when other children played “Ring a ring of roses,” or “Nuts in May,” or even stood up and recited “Cock Robin,” her cross baby merely sat on her lap and refused even to look at anyone. At home, however, he was everything that was pleasing; industrious, kind, and very tolerant; but, although he was so fond of her, and always running to her to ask what she was doing or to show her his own affair, he never, she felt, treated her quite as an equal. With his great-aunts and uncles, however, he at once became completely intimate. He suited them. They admired the way he sat on the floor for hours in absolute silence, busy with his own concerns, and the quietness and propriety of his ways about the house. These features made his determination, his strong likes and dislikes, his secret but decided ideas, so much the more attractive and interesting. And he seemed, it often struck Fanny, more at home with Roger or Deborah than with either of his parents. With Anthony he was always a little defiant and rather apprehensive, as Anthony used to punish him. Fanny could not be surprised at the child’s attitude; she knew that her own would have been the same if Anthony were in the habit of beating her. She could not do anything

to stop it, however, and, as Gerry never told tales, the outward surface of their life was serene. But at the age of two he already felt a profound sympathy with his elderly relations, who, on their part, felt quite at ease in his company, although they were not as a rule taken with small children.

Roger's behaviour to him Fanny watched with secret anxiety and eagerness ; it gave her sweet satisfaction, after her own history of difficulties and thwartedness, to see how simply and naturally he and the child accepted each other in their infrequent meetings. When Roger, much to everyone's surprise, proposed to take him, unaccompanied, to the Zoo, and to have tea there, it never occurred to her to ask the elder not to let him eat anything that would disagree with his very delicate digestion. She took it for granted that they would both reject everything but the thin pieces of brown and white bread and butter, which they would eat under the plane-trees.

Deborah, immersed in schemes of practical benevolence, about this time introduced to Fanny's notice a friend of her own who had adopted a little Russian girl. The circumstances were peculiar. Miss Marsham, being the neighbour of two cultivated and handsome Russians, had discovered that they treated their child of four with abominable cruelty. The case was so shocking that, though she had some difficulty in establishing her charges, once this had been accomplished, she easily secured the intervention of a magistrate, and, when the father said that if she persisted in her interference she must take the responsibility of the child altogether, she recklessly agreed to do so. She had practically no money of her own, but, as she explained, the chance to separate the child entirely from them, and by legal



means, was so invaluable, that she felt she could not stop to consider anything else.

The child was at present living with her in her room, and Deborah, anxious to secure as much interest for it as she could, asked Fanny whether she had anything of Gerry's that might be useful for it, for it was very small even for its four years, and suggested that she might even like to go and visit Miss Marsham. Fanny agreed readily, and it was arranged that Gerry should spend the afternoon with his aunts and be fetched by her after tea.

When they arrived at the house, it was discovered that Deborah was unavoidably out on a last moment appointment, and Athene therefore presented herself, and, with some misgiving, took charge of Gerry. They went into the morning-room, and he unpacked the drawing-book, chalks, and pencils he had brought with him and immediately sat down to draw. He was never tired of producing long scribbles of chalk which meant nothing to anyone else, but which kept him absorbed for hours. Athene sat down in the window and began to sew ; he was very good at present. " But suppose he goes off suddenly ? " she thought. Going off, in her mind, meant any sudden manifestation of intractable behaviour. " If he does," she thought, threading her needle, " I shall be perfectly cowardly, and let him do whatever he likes, unless he wants to jump off the roof. After all, I am at least stronger than he is ; he can't do anything that I really determine he shan't ; " though she shuddered inwardly at the thought of having her shins kicked. At this moment he looked up, and met her glance with such a friendly and confiding smile that she reproached herself for her treacherous thoughts, and for having even contemplated, fiend that she was, having to use violence towards him. She put her work

aside and sat with her hands clasped round her knee, to show that she was ready to do the least thing he might want of her. But he wanted nothing, except to go on with his drawing ; now that he had become used to the room he was feeling very happy. He liked to look up now and then and watch her sewing, with one leg over the other and her foot swinging out into the room. It was treating him so properly, like a grown-up person ; grown-up people are allowed to sit in a room and do their work, but children are nearly always interfered with, and asked what they are doing. His confidence in her had been complete and unquestioning from the first, and, as the afternoon wore away undisturbed, hers in him became equally so, so that when she had heard a distant bell ring and said she was afraid that must be a visitor, she at once agreed to his proposal that they should run away and hide. They crept out into a little round conservatory and crouched down behind some bamboo garden furniture stored there. The bell, however, had been rung by Henry, who had forgotten his latchkey, and had looked in to see if Athene wanted any relief. He found no one in the downstairs rooms, but, on coming into the conservatory, was intrigued rather than surprised to see a leg and foot, which he felt sure must be hers, sticking out from behind a garden chair. He stopped and said out loud :

“ Those sillies have gone out. I was going to take them down to Westminster in my car and give them tea there, but now I shall have to go without them.” He paused a moment, and Gerry, who did not want to go out, but was anxious to go back and finish chalking, looked anxiously at Athene to see if she showed any signs of crawling out, but she was sitting with her eyes tightly shut, trying to keep the dry earth that trickled

down from the plant pots out of them. Henry inferred from the silence that his help was not needed, and was walking away, when the springs of Gerry's kindness were touched, and he scrambled out and ran after him, saying that he was going to go on chalking. Henry bent himself almost double, said that would be a very good plan, and Gerry must go out with him another day. Athene, rising up from the débris—as Henry said, like some supernatural apparition—tried to persuade him to have tea with them, but he was obliged to fly off and leave them. They had tea, therefore, by themselves, and this also passed over without mishap and with considerable hilarity, though this did not reconcile Athene to Deborah's non-appearance. "The wretch!" she thought. "For all she knows I may be being torn in pieces." When they had mopped the crumbs up off each other with their pocket handkerchiefs, she sat down and began to play the piano, but she soon perceived that he was not listening, and was hovering idly about in search of something to do, for the tea-things had replaced his drawing materials. She turned round on the stool, therefore, and told him the story of the White Cat, and was undergoing a severe examination as to why all the people had behaved as they did, and what their names were, when Fanny arrived to fetch him. She was full of regrets and concern when she found that Athene had had to bear the whole brunt of entertaining him, but, without troubling herself to make any protestations, Miss Simon allowed it to appear that she had not been put out. As they went off together, it occurred to Fanny that if she were to die now, to-morrow, it would not be a calamity for him; he already had a secure niche in the world—he had already taken his place in his family.

How unlike the little girl she had seen that afternoon ! She had found Miss Marsham a red-faced, spectacled, vigorous, and very pleasant lady, living in two rooms, and in one of them, on the bed made up as a sofa, the child was playing with a doll. She was beautiful ; her bronze hair curled over her shoulders and in very delicate rings round her face, which still had the roundness of a baby's. Her black eyes were extremely lively and expressive, and as she looked up at their coming in her expression had a mixture of vivacity and affection that, in her circumstances, struck Fanny as heart-breaking. Miss Marsham had given her the outlines of the story before they came in. " I sometimes feel," said the honest creature, wiping her eyes, " that I would like her to grow up not knowing there is such a place as Russia in the world, but of course that is wrong and feeble. But, anyway, I've got her. I can't tell you the unspeakable delight it is, after what I saw, just to be able to look after her and do the ordinary things for her ; not, of course, that I can give her what a child ought to have, but anything rather—insane, they must have been. There is no other explanation."

" Will they contribute anything to her support ? "

" An order has been made out, but, now they have gone off to Berlin, what hold has one over them ? Besides, I don't care—I really don't. I feel she's better without even that connection with them."

When they came in her manner altered at once, and in a gay and brisk voice she suggested their going for a short walk. Marina laid by the doll at once, and, lifting up her brilliant, smiling eyes, said :

" Shall I wear my red coat ? "

The charming little voice and the joyous smile, unconscious of the background of cruelty and hopeless

tears, and of the precarious nature of the present, in which she had only this one friend to shield her from desolation, made Fanny's heart ache so much that the tears filled her eyes as she watched the coat and hat being put on. Marina, looking at her curiously as she went out, said "Don't cry," and ran on to the front door as lightly as a bird hopping.

"To any child," exclaimed Fanny, "but particularly to such a charming one."

"A form of insanity," muttered Miss Marsham. "I think if they had been English people they could have been shut up; as it was—only staying here for a short time—they disappeared in the middle of everything."

When they got into Regent's Park the air did them good, and they remembered that the nightmare was over, and discussed Miss Marsham's plans with animation. Marina also became quite spirited, and told a large and ugly starling that was straddling about their path to go away. They parted in time for Fanny to fetch Gerry, Miss Marsham saying, "If you should have anything in the way of clothes, Mrs. Simon, that you could spare, I should be so grateful on her behalf. I am quite shameless in begging for her, you see."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Fanny fervently, "I will look and see directly I get home. And," she added, "if you would let her come sometimes and play with my little boy, I should be very much pleased to look after her." Miss Marsham welcomed the suggestion eagerly, and Fanny was pleased, particularly on Gerry's account. She was beginning to wonder whether he ought not to see more of other children. She felt sure he would, in time, take to Marina, so airy and so gentle; and she was growing rather anxious about his long periods of immovable reserve. No doubt it showed singular mental

qualities, but she was not sure that it did not also suggest a certain selfishness, a dislike of being bothered by other people.

When they reached home, and Gerry made off at once to the nursery, she followed him, and sat down by him on the floor, where he was already pulling the cover off a large box of bricks, his latest treasure.

"Would you like," she said, "to give some of your toys to a little girl who has hardly any?"

He went on pulling at the cover, and she saw that her words had not at all represented the case. She did not wish to present his future playmate to him in a pathetic light, but her voice quivered in spite of herself as she carefully chose her words.

"I think it would be very nice if you could give her some. She hasn't any father or mother to look after her and give her things."

"Hasn't she?" he said, taking out the yellow bricks, which he wanted first.

"Her father and mother are alive, but they were dreadfully unkind to her. Suppose daddy and I were always very unkind to you, and locked you up by yourself and didn't wash you or give you meals, and were always scolding you and beating you. Wouldn't you like someone to be nice to you and bring you toys?"

It was no use; the vision she conjured up was too fantastic to take any hold of his sensible mind. She realised she had been idiotic; perhaps culpable. She got up from her knees and went into her bedroom, where she looked out two pairs of socks that she thought Gerry could spare, and some vests; the child was so small they would probably fit her. What else could one find for a little girl? She put aside a petticoat of her own that could be cut up, and an old print dress. Her eyes



rested on a length of white quilling, bought for some forgotten purpose, and it occurred to her that she could buy a little hat and line the brim with it. She decided to make up the frocks herself, and meanwhile she put the socks and vests into a parcel, and added six of her smallest handkerchiefs, as the only suitable things she could lay hands on at the moment. She went downstairs to take it to the post, wanting Miss Marsham to have it as soon as possible ; Passingham was putting away the washing in the linen cupboard as she passed and, when she was at the hall door, called out to know if she wanted the bathroom curtains changed that week.

Fanny, already poised on the threshold, felt no inclination to turn her thoughts back into the house, so she slipped quietly out, pretending not to have heard.

"Do I want the bathroom curtains changed?" she thought, as she went down the path. "I don't want anything, except to climb into his arms and lie there for ever."

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Anthony was, as he had hoped to be, thoroughly enjoying his old life. He wavered between two states of mind—the pleasures of having a wife, a house, and a baby and of being moderately but steadily successful financially—for his work for M. Sureau had created a small vogue for him in precisely the circle where he would have wished for it—and one of slight misgiving, in which he wondered whether he wasn't becoming too mundane and prosperous. He took his own work rather more seriously than most other people took it, and, whereas they thought that it didn't matter much what happened to his painting as long as he were a healthy and happy young man, he felt that it was essential

to preserve his artistic faculties at all costs. Or, rather, he thought so ; he actually felt, very often, that nothing mattered except his emotional preoccupation and the ever-varying interests of his ordinary life. He could not be very seriously disturbed, as he was working hard and with pleasure ; it was merely that he hoped his work was not losing, in its mature phase, the attractiveness of very early youth. Ivan, whom he sounded uneasily on the subject, was so rude about the work, both in its past and present stages, that, as he himself admitted, Anthony must really have had a great deal of good in him to take it as he did. Fanny was obliged, in private and unending conversations, to administer more consolation and encouragement than she felt strictly justified in doing, as Anthony seemed so seriously cast down, and to have been mesmerised for the time into seeing his work, with Ivan's eyes, as soulless, stylish and essentially uninteresting. He soon recovered, however, and avoiding asking Ivan to the house, went on his way with renewed vigour, only hoping that he ought not to have a life of ceaseless conflict and privation.

He was hanging over Fanny's dressing-table one evening when they were going to dine out with Lydia and some of her friends. He had been looking in the glass to assure himself that his face was not becoming elderly, and, seeing no sign whatever that it was, he was feeling extremely satisfied. Fanny came in from her bath and began to put on her evening dress without disturbing him from his position. He did not like something about the hard, efficient manner in which she was dressing herself ; it seemed that she really was becoming a little stern and forthright in her manner, and losing her feminine graces. At that moment, however, she came up to the glass and began to arrange her hair—putting her

hands up to it, indeed, but looking at his reflection instead of her own, with a sudden, rather timid smile. It gave him a sensation of great relief, and, to prevent himself smiling, he rubbed a drop of liquid rouge from a little phial on to the back of his hand and said gloomily, "This stuff is no good."

"I never use it," she said. "I don't know how I got it." He insisted, however, that she should use some; the immovable paleness of her face, now he came to notice it, was perhaps responsible for the rather set, bleak look she had worn lately. It was nothing to do with her health, for it was her feelings alone that made the quickly changing colour in her face, giving it a vividness like mother-of-pearl. And, if she did not feel blushing, she should repair her paleness with something until she did. He was reassured by her little smile, but he still thought she was lacking in something of her varying charm. She understood, without his saying anything, that something was not quite right, but she did not at that moment connect it with herself.

Next day, however, she inadvertently went into her bedroom, where Gerry was taking his morning rest, before it was time for him to get up. He hated resting in his own bedroom, and did not particularly care for Anthony's; the trees sticking out of a row of shoes frightened him in some obscure way, and he did not like the way in which his father would sometimes come in for something, look stern, and go out without saying anything. It was lovely in Fanny's bedroom, however; interesting things lay about everywhere, and sparkled if it were a bright day, and the head and foot of the bed had panels of blue brocade worked with little circles of pink flowers which were delightful to examine. Also she would always be persuaded to talk if she came

in ; and therefore, realising her own weakness, she always tried to make a point of not coming. To-day, however, she forgot, and, when she had taken a clean handkerchief, Gerry said wouldn't she stay just a tiny bit ? She saw it was twenty minutes to one, and thought perhaps she might as well ; so she sat down on the edge of the bed and gazed out of the window at the branches of a sycamore.

"What are you doing ? " asked Gerry.

"I'm watching a branch."

"Don't watch it."

"Why not ? "

"I don't want you to."

She turned her head to give him her attention, but at that moment she felt herself sinking down and down in the quietness of the mid-day pause, and that when life reassumed its pace at lunch-time she would not be able to come quite up to the surface again. Gerry was taking off her wedding-ring and threading it on one strand of her hair, but very gently, and without pulling any ; she hardly realised what he was doing ; but afterwards she always counted this moment in her own mind as the one from which she began to feel the inroad of despair. For at the dinner-party the night before, which had been very successful and amusing, Roger had been spoken of, and she had felt, even as she had felt when they spoke of coming back to London, only this time more strongly, that she could not bear to think, in the middle of that cheerful scene, of the burden of her love. Sitting on the bed at this moment, she wondered whether, even if he stood at the door and held out his arms to her, she would have the strength to go to him. The thought was so strange that it made her feel lost to herself, and as the day went on she began to question herself, sitting

alone with a bleak and bitter face of which Anthony had seen the shadow the night before.

She began to think, " I know I loved him at first, but afterwards—was this desolation of my life the result of love, or was it simply an obsession that I was too weak to cast off? Why do I feel this sudden drying up of my whole self? If it had all been real, would it not be still going on as strongly as ever? " She was tortured by the uncertainty of her feelings since she had admitted this doubt ; if it had all been real, her weariness and woe, her ruined peace, her hopeless youth, were as nothing—the inevitable result of something not to be questioned or withstood. But if it had all been brought about by the weakness of her own mind, in which love and unhappiness had grown to the enormous power of an obsession through that weakness, instead of by its own inherent strength ; if it were not a passion so deep and so overpowering that her life had naturally fallen a prey to it, but, instead, merely something from which a little courage, a little fortitude, would have saved her, then she was lost indeed. She had never, in the sharpest moments of her misery, experienced the wild, barren hopelessness and fear that began to creep over her now. Then there had always been the comfort and assurance, unrecognised though it was, of sanity ; she had been in possession of herself. Now it seemed that even her self was lost to her. The suspicion and darkness, from its first approach, deepened so rapidly in her mind, that all her past conduct became odious to her. As she lay by Anthony's side at midnight, although she knew that he loved her dearly and had wanted to marry her for his own sake, she reviewed her connection with him and his family as something done without proper excuse ; she burned and shrank with dismay as she thought of every

way in which she had come before their notice, not as a person blindly impelled by some uncontrollable force, but as something contemptible, grovelling ; and what was it that she had done ? In the aching silence of the night she accused herself of having forced an entry on privacy and peace, of having seen virtue and high intellectual power and grace, and of having been so little moved by its real loveliness that she had aspired to make herself one with it, instead of admiring, and passing on, with a realisation of the gulf between it and herself. And what of Anthony ? Could anything, she now asked herself, do away with the guiltiness of marrying a man one did not love—the guilt of inducing him to give the complete reserves of his inmost self to someone who did not love him, and therefore ought not to receive it ? The fact that people did it every day, that he had taken her on her own terms and asked for nothing more, was utterly irrelevant now. Nothing could palliate her conduct in this moment. And yet, as each accusation forced its way upon her mind, her heart exclaimed, as if it were an explanation so complete as to be in itself an excuse :

“ Yes, but it was Roger ! ”

“ I know I gave up all delicacy, all pride, all self-respect, but it was Roger ! I know I did what my own conscience told me was wrong, and that I made myself unworthy even to love him. But it was Roger ! Just to hear about him, to be near him, to see him sometimes—that was the reason for everything I did.” But she could not rest on this answer ; the thought that perhaps it had only been perverseness, a stubborn, blind tenacity, a greed for happiness that nursed itself sullenly when it was thwarted, poisoned the fountain of repose that had sprung from the mere constancy of her love ; the secret



place of her being into which she had always turned, melancholy but infinitely beautiful, was now strange, and she was an outcast from her own heart. The rapid translation of feeling into bodily sensation made her feel that she was growing numb, and that if she were to try to scream she would not be able to make a sound. However, with the return of daylight she felt more herself ; she fell asleep soundly at about half-past five, and three hours later awoke to the sound of Anthony shaving next door, and exclaiming what a fine day it was.

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Ivan Archer had felt obliged to avoid their house since the unfortunate fracas with Anthony, but one afternoon ten days or so later, having been told by a mutual friend that Anthony was making a drawing on the Embankment, he thought he would just look in on Fanny—to break the ice, as it were. He arrived after lunch, and Passingham, thinking Fanny to be in one of the downstairs rooms, allowed him to dismiss her and went back to the kitchen. Ivan looked into all the rooms, but only found Gerry, playing with marbles on the drawing-room floor. He stayed to construct a marble run in the earth of the window-box, then went upstairs to see if Fanny were in her bedroom.

When he reached the landing, he saw Fanny sitting on the top flight—or, rather, lying, for her head was resting on the stair above her. She said nothing as he came up and as he stood curiously over her, he wondered whether she was ill or had hurt herself. He did not offer to help her up, as an ordinary man would at once have done. A strange, individual tact restrained him. Presently he leant over her and said :

“Don’t cry, Fanny. That’s what baby girls do.”

Then he added, "What are you doing here?" He had to stoop lower to hear what she said at last :

"I was just waiting."

"What were you waiting for?"

"Till I felt better."

"Do you feel better now?"

"Yes."

He helped her on to her feet, and stood for a moment puzzled. He did not want to leave her like this ; on the other hand, the bank closed at three. So he said, "Do you think some air might do you good? How about driving to the bank with me? I've got a taxi outside." She nodded, and, without further words, he took her downstairs and into the taxi ; his light overcoat was on the seat, and he put this round her ; the folds came up to her ears, and the breeze gradually pushed up the light strands of her black hair in a way which amused and pleased him. When he had cashed his cheque, they drove back slowly to Hampstead in the warm, transparent afternoon. Fanny felt the hair lightly blown about her head, but she had for the moment ceased thinking as nearly as was possible for a conscious human being. The mind-sickness she had been feeling had given place to a numbness that was only faintly alarming. She heard Ivan's description of the fireworks on the Grand Parade that had illuminated the upturned faces for a second, now pink, now green, before they disappeared into the darkness again, but it fell on her ears as if it had been a strain of music, and called out no reply in words. He continued his stories, however, with perfect ease and friendliness, without betraying a sign of surprise or uneasiness. When they drew up at the house and got out, she began to walk so slowly up the path to the front door that he picked her up in his arms

and carried her in. He had just reached the hall when the drawing-room door opened and Anthony came out, and stood quite transfixed at the sight before him.

"Now, Anthony, don't be a fool," said Ivan urgently, genuinely anxious to make everything all right. Anthony mastered his surprise, annoyance, and anxiety, and merely held out his arms to relieve Ivan. Fanny, however, now stood on the ground and walked slowly upstairs to her bedroom. Anthony followed her, and Ivan went into the drawing-room.

"Well," he said, when Anthony came down again, "shall you have the doctor?"

Anthony was so much put out by Ivan's interference that he was inclined to think much less of Fanny's condition than he would otherwise have done.

"I don't think so," he said. "She will go to bed in a minute. I think she's just rather tired; we've been doing a good deal lately."

"Well," said Ivan, "I should think you ought to get someone in." He looked gloomy.

"Thanks very much for your help," said Anthony rather stiffly.

"All right," said Ivan; he gathered up his hat and stick and went off saying, "Well, I'll be off."

When he had gone, Anthony went upstairs again, prepared to consider the case a little more seriously. Fanny was lying outside the bed, looking wan and unregarding. He stood by the bed with hands in his pockets and stared down at her; she lay quite calm and unembarrassed under his gaze, her left hand playing with the corner of the eiderdown. He stood for some moments, glowering in the intensity of his preoccupation. He wondered whether perhaps he ought to send

for a doctor, when Gerry came in at the door, wanting Fanny to come down to tea.

“Run away,” said Anthony hastily, but she lifted her arm and said, “Do let him come in,” so he picked him up and put him down on the bed. Gerry at once became very quiet, and began stroking the folds of her dress. She roused herself with an effort and said, “Let us all have tea up here.” Anthony was so much relieved to hear her speak normally that he at once departed in search of a large tray to put the tea-things on. Passingham came up in a few minutes with the tray containing cakes and glass plates of jam, and, returning, came back with a small tray containing a little tea equipment especially for Fanny, which she put on the table beside the bed, thus marking her appreciation of the fact that she required looking after. Fanny was propped up, and drank a great deal of tea, and felt better. Everyone, in fact, felt better, and, except for Anthony’s speaking rather tartly to Gerry for dropping crumbs on the eider-down, the tea passed off in a happy and reviving manner.

Anthony was excessively relieved to find that Fanny was not going to be ill after all, and when tea was over he lifted Gerry off the bed and sent him downstairs, and then hung over her pillow and caressed her in a glow of tenderness. She was very quiet, but quite responsive, and he declared that she must have a rest and go away if necessary, but certainly stay in bed to breakfast the next day.

He got up alone, therefore, the next morning and she was quite content to stay where she was ; there were several of Gerry’s clothes to mend and some stockings to darn, and she sat up in bed sewing, thinking of nothing but the buttons and stitches, and perfectly placid. Her breakfast came up, and she could hear the noises of the

early morning down below—the brushing of a broom, and the banging of doors as Anthony went from the breakfast-room to the studio and back again ; his step on the tiles of the hall and Gerry's voice, upraised in some remark which the slam of the door shut off from her.

She was lying down again when Anthony came upstairs, having breakfasted, with an envelope in his hand.

“ Look,” he said, “ Lydia has sent these. She took them when they were in the country last week.” He spread out some snapshots on the quilt. Her eye lighted on one of James sitting on a wall and screwing up his eyes against the sun.

“ That's rather nice,” she said languidly, and was going to hope that when Lydia came to stay with them she would take Gerry.

“ But this one is the best,” said Anthony, and he held out one of Athene, huddled up in a short and full fur coat and walking down a garden path. “ Do you remember the cranes we saw under the tree in Regent's Park ?” asked Anthony. “ She looks like one of them ; they walk about with their bills pushed out and their feathers all bunched up, you know, and long delicate legs sticking out at the bottom.” Fanny smiled and agreed, and laid the photograph down again.

“ And here's Roger,” said Anthony.

She did not know when he left the room. She was lying on the pillow blinded by unnoticed tears when she realised that she was alone. The sight of all his remembered lines and pose as he stood against a clear background of sky, endeared to her inmost soul, and in an alien place, removed out of her life for ever, caused a tide of anguish to rise in her, overwhelming the dry and barren region of her heart and bringing consciousness

of every fibre as if it had been wrapped in flame. But in the next instant she raised her head in triumphant agony.

"It was real," she thought, "every moment—real and true."

All the treasures of happiness she had known, the radiance that had touched her days came before her again in unobscured beauty. She marvelled that anything could have come between her and her memory of it, that a film could have darkened her vision of what she had known to be truly great. Suffering had returned, but in the midst of it she felt a pride and an exultation.

"How could I," she thought, "have doubted my real existence? I must be living to feel such pain."

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Roger, on his return to town, had found a package from his friend, the connoisseur of Chinese art. Mr. Lacey had promised to keep his eye open for a pot of peach glow Ming that could be procured at a reasonable price, and he had now fulfilled his promise. Roger stood at his desk, littered with string and shavings and turned about in his hand the exquisite shape which held the light like satin, and gazed and gazed at the scattered yet formal pattern, minute and sophisticated, with the sharpness of the finest pen, and yet the delicate brilliance of petals and dew and airy plumes. He was lost in abstraction, and, wondering why it should be that, while grief was a binding down and a forcing of the spirit in upon itself, joy was scattering, and that while he looked at this triumph of Oriental subtlety there should fall across his eyes the vision of heavenly-bright English fields.









